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BETWEEN THE LINES IN FRANCE

*A Boys' Story of the Great
European War*

BY

FRANKLIN T. AMES *pend.*

AUTHOR OF "BETWEEN THE LINES IN BELGIUM."

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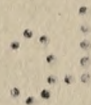
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PREFACE

IN the first book of this European War Series I had the pleasure of taking the young reader through some of the thrilling scenes that marked the progress of the Kaiser's vast army across Belgium. It is the purpose and aim of the present volume to follow the adventurous career of the little party who expected to tour Northern France in an automobile, with a French chauffeur.

Of course they, in common with nearly all other American tourists, had heard vague rumors of the impending trouble between the Great Powers; but supposed that, as had happened many times before, it would all end in a mere "flash in the pan." Imagine their desperate situation when they suddenly found themselves stranded in the hilly section of Northern France, with the knowledge that the long smoldering war fire had burst into a fierce flame.

The very hour that the order for mobilization went out by wire every passenger and freight train in the Republic passed into the service of the French Government. Travelers found themselves set adrift at the first station reached; while the cars were used for the speedy concentration of troops

Preface

and munitions of war. With the life of the Nation at stake private interests were not considered.

When in addition to this difficulty it is remembered that every motor car worth having was immediately commandeered for the use of the army, it is not to be wondered at that tourists quickly found themselves in desperate straits.

It is the intention of the writer to not only arouse the reader's interest by a narration of stirring adventures but at the same time to base many of these incidents upon features connected with the Great War that are historically correct.

I trust that every boy and girl who reads this book, as well as the preceding volume, will obtain considerable knowledge of the European conflict, with its lights and shadows, and that it will thus be discovered how every nation, great and small, may have its patriotic heroes, ready to sacrifice their all for their beloved country.

FRANKLIN T. AMES.

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Sitting there, and with every nerve on edge, Tom and
Lucille listened to the sound of the battle (Page
274) *Frontispiece* ✓

FACING
PAGE

And then came a shock that upset them all into the road-
way 94 ✓

“Surround that man, and if he tries to escape cut him
down like a wolf!” 140 ✓

Tom found himself covered by several rifles gripped in the
hands of men who wore baggy red trousers — French
soldiers of the line 244 ✓

BETWEEN THE LINES IN FRANCE

CHAPTER I

THE STREETS OF LONDON

"OH! well, what's the use of denying it? I did think at first it was a live officer. Now, laugh as much as you please, everybody!"

"They say you begged the wax Bobby's pardon for stepping on his toes; is that so, Lucille?"

"Now, Uncle Alvin, that's carrying the joke too far, for I never said a word."

"Well, anyway, she opened her mouth to apologize, like the little lady she is, when Mart spoiled the whole thing by telling us to look at the make-believe policeman."

This chatter sprang from a merry party of sight-seers in London on a warm summer day. They walked along near the Marble Arch of Hyde Park in squads, though keeping close enough in touch to exchange friendly remarks, amidst considerable merriment and laughter.

There were three groups, consisting of four par-

ties each, and all of the tourists hailed from the Land of Liberty across the Atlantic. Although friends of long standing in America, they had different objects in view when making this trip to Europe during vacation time.

The Dorrs intended spending most of their time in Belgium, whence their family had come originally. They had a relative somewhere off toward the German border who had extended a warm invitation to them to pay him a long visit. Besides Mr. Dorr and his good wife there were two boys, Martin, and Harvey his cousin, in this group.

Then came the Maillards, three of them, Uncle Alvin, Tom, a sturdy chap over sixteen at this time, and Lucille, his sister, about a year his senior. They purposed enjoying an automobile tour through Northern France, visiting several famous sections which had more or less to do with the Maillard family history.

The Caslons numbered three also, Paul and Henry, twins, about the same age as Tom Maillard, and their mother, who was a widow. Austria was the field they meant to explore, though first intending to cross to France in company with those who were headed for Paris.

Last of all were the Bartletts, Frank almost a man grown, and Thomas just turned seventeen. Heading first of all for Hamburg they expected to make their way to the wonderful country of the

Rhine, and see everything worth looking at in that section of the German Empire.

As this story will deal in the main with the three Maillards it is only proper that we should describe Tom, his lively sister, and their uncle at further length.

Tom was a wideawake boy, able to see nearly everything that occurred within range of his vision. He had shown himself fairly clever in everything he undertook, from running an automobile, to picking up what useful knowledge a boy is supposed to learn, if he takes advantage of his opportunities.

At home Tom had for two years been connected with a Boy Scout troop, and had worked himself up from a mere tenderfoot to the position of first-class scout. He was particularly fond of outdoor life, and able to shift for himself to a remarkable degree. Indeed, his chums used to say that if Tom were dropped in the midst of an interminable forest, with just three matches, a knife, some cord for a bow, and a little salt in his possession, he would be able to live royally for a week, always provided there was game to be found, to be caught in the snares he would set.

Such an enterprising and resourceful lad can get along almost anywhere; and even in a strange land these qualities were apt to stand him in good stead.

His sister Lucille, although older than Tom, was rather diminutive in size. What she lacked in

stature, however, she made up for in activity. Lucille also loved Nature, and was so fond of walking and horseback exercise that she presented the picture of health. Tom at times called her his "pal," and indeed, a boy might go a long way before meeting a better all-around chum than Lucille Maillard.

As for Uncle Alvin, he was about the best old fellow a boy and girl could hope to have with them on a foreign tour. In his way he was quaint, but always good-natured. He had a faculty for getting into trouble, though nothing could force him to see anything but the silver lining to the cloud. In Uncle Alvin's opinion things could always have been much worse than they were; and when Tom, who was a little given to complaining, vented his ill-humor it was Uncle Alvin who always cast oil on the troubled waters.

He was not very robust, and subject to occasional dizzy spells; but so full of humor and merry sayings that all the young people were delighted to be in his company.

They had done London pretty thoroughly in the short time they could spare. With motor cars to whisk tourists around in these modern days much more can be seen in a limited time than formerly.

As their chatter would indicate, they had recently visited the famous Madame Tausaud's Museum and Waxworks, where almost every important person in the world's history has been represented.

Here numerous traps set to deceive visitors had given the young people cause for amusement. Lucille was not the first person by many thousands who had been deceived by the mock policeman, or other images suddenly come upon in life-like attitudes.

They were now on the way to their hotel, since the pilgrims bound for Belgium had to get ready to go to their boat. The party would break up into three sections in London, though they planned to get together again later on, if possible, in Rome, and cross to New York on the same steamer.

Needless to say these plans were sadly disarranged by events which few people at the time suspected were hiding just below the horizon.

Harvey Dorr had been taking a number of photographs with a little camera that he had received as a present from a relative, and which contained the finest lens money could buy. He had arranged it cunningly so that in reality it looked very much like an humble little package of lunch, covered with coarse brown paper, and tied with a rough cord.

By manipulating this in a certain way Harvey was able to take a great many pictures that might not otherwise have been possible. He called it true art to be able to catch an urchin's pose without the subject knowing that he was having his picture taken.

This concealed camera was the object of considerable boasting on the part of its owner, and naturally

one thing led to another until finally Tom Maillard scoffed at Harvey's declaration that he would get numerous forbidden snapshots of forts and all such things, while visiting in Belgium.

"You'll land in jail in a big hurry if you try that sort of game," Tom told Harvey, "because these Germans and French and English and Belgians are always suspicious of spies; and any one seen taking a picture of military subjects is put in the lockup on the run. Take my word for it you'll not be able to show three of that kind of snapshots when we meet in Rome; and if you keep your camera you'll be lucky."

Of course that led to more warm talk, and ended in a wager being laid. This was to the effect that Harvey should be able to have on display at least a dozen pictures of such forbidden subjects as fortresses, warships, troops at maneuvers, air craft, and other matters pertaining to a country's defenses.

"I'm real sorry for you, Harvey," Tom would remark at every chance he got.

"Oh, don't waste your sympathy," the Dorr boy would retort, not one whit dismayed by all these gloomy predictions of trouble ahead; "you'll need it all for yourself when you begin to have your motor troubles in that rough country you expect to tour through. I've fixed it all so that nobody would ever dream I had a camera."

"So much the worse for you when they do find it

out," jeered Tom, "because then they'll be dead sure you are a German spy. Haven't I heard you spouting what little you know of the German language? When we eat that dinner at Rome we'll think of you, Harvey, and shed a tear or two ditto."

"How about us over in Germany?" asked Frank Bartlett. "Do you think we will get into any trouble because Thomas here is carrying a pair of marine glasses that were made in Paris?"

"I'd scratch the maker's name off if I were you," Tom Maillard told him, jokingly; "you see the Kaiser doesn't want anything French around him these days. Even down in Alsace and Lorraine, the provinces taken from France after the War of 1870, they forbid the use of that language, trying to make over the people into good Germans."

They were now on the Strand, which as usual was a crowded thoroughfare, being in places almost impassable. Only for the efforts of the "Bobbies" and the frequent "isles of safety" in the middle of the thoroughfare it would have been next to impossible for the party to cross from one side to the other.

The boys never grew weary of watching the vehicles worm their way along. Since the coming of the motor 'bus the old time stages with their horses had disappeared; but the jam was even worse than before.

Upon these public conveyances there were an un-

limited number of flaming advertisements, almost completely hiding the sides in some cases. This was a new departure to the travelers, since it has never been carried to such an excess across the water; and they were never tired of making all manner of fun at some of the grotesque signs displayed.

Upon the tops of the motor 'buses they saw numerous people who amused them by their appearance. Possibly it was because they were set up in such plain sight, as though on parade, for there were other spectacles all around just as amusing had they chosen to observe them.

"Oh! look at that funny little man and the big woman he's with!" exclaimed Tom Maillard, pointing to a 'bus that was passing at the moment. "There's your chance for a dandy snapshot, Harv. He's certainly a character; and say, I'd like to know if that's his wife along with him."

"Oh! I've got him tied down all right," remarked Harvey, carelessly, as he dropped his hands containing the seemingly innocent-looking brown paper package; "and that's going to be a bully picture, because the light was just right."

"There," said Lucille, suddenly, "now he's looking back this way as if he wonders why on earth so many savages from across the big pond have come to dear old London. Oh! mercy! did you see the way she gave him a shake then, and made him face

front? Why, she must be a regular Tartar, I should think."

"Well, the fact of the matter is, Lucille," said Paul Caslon, with a wink at the rest, "the lady must have noticed that there was a pretty girl in the party, and she objects to her poor henpecked husband turning to look back. But I'm sorry for that little man; he must be led a dance by such a wife."

Although the incident gave them occasion for a little merriment, neither Tom Maillard nor his sister dreamed that they would ever set eyes again on the subjects of Harvey's latest snapshot. Nor could they suspect what a remarkable and thrilling setting the picture would have when, by sheer accident, they once more found themselves gazing on that illy-assorted pair.

"I'm sorry we have to break up our party so soon, just when we were having the time of our lives," Uncle Alvin said, as they prepared to cross to the opposite side of the Strand, because their hotel happened to be situated close by in that quarter.

"But all of us are anxious to commence the real object of our trip across to this side," Mrs. Caslon remarked. "Seeing London, after all, is simply an incident of the journey. And we are looking forward to a most enjoyable summer, some in Belgium, others in France and Germany, as well as the Austrian Tyrol."

“What wonderful things we will have to tell when we meet again!” ventured Mr. Dorr, “and if Harvey is successful with his pictures we expect to find pleasure in looking over his collection.”

At that Tom Maillard was heard to give a scornful laugh; and Harvey frowned in his direction, well knowing what was in the other's mind. Undoubtedly Tom fully expected that the ambitious amateur photographer would indeed have some thrilling adventures to relate, if he could ever convince the authorities that he meant no harm in breaking their strict injunctions against carrying a camera into military reservations.

“Now's our chance to get over!” called out Uncle Alvin, a little excitedly, as the officer waved back the seemingly never-ending procession of every kind of vehicle known to London street traffic, thus giving the cross stream a chance to move forward.

The party began to head for the other side, when there must have been some misunderstanding of signals; for some of the stalled vehicles started moving again. The two ladies uttered little shrieks of alarm, though possibly there was really no danger of their being run over; and the boys immediately seized upon them so as to ferry them safely across. Then Mr. Dorr called out at the top of his voice:

“Look to your uncle, Tom; he's been seized with one of his fainting spells, and may be run over by that motor 'bus!”

CHAPTER II

CROSSING THE CHANNEL

As it happened, just at that critical moment none of the boys was within reaching distance of Uncle Alvin. They had bustled up to assist Mart's mother and Mrs. Caslon across so that the stricken man was almost under the oncoming motor 'bus when a gentleman sprang forward and snatched him from the imminent peril.

It was done so deftly that Tom Maillard, who had attempted to hurry back to render what assistance he could, found his uncle safely deposited on the pavement.

The stranger was a rather pleasant looking man, with a remarkably keen eye, and a business-like air. Somehow he did not impress the party as an Englishman and when he spoke they were more than ever convinced that he must be a foreigner.

"Can I do anything further for you, sir?" he asked Mr. Maillard, who was already fast recovering from his swooning spell.

"Nothing, thank you," weakly replied the old gentleman, with one of his rare smiles that always charmed people. "I am subject to an occasional attack of this kind. It couldn't have taken me at

a more unfortunate time; but fortunately you were the friend in time of need, sir. I thank you very much for your assistance."

The others had gathered around, and Mr. Dorr, liking the looks of the stranger, as well as feeling under obligations to him on account of what he had so cleverly done, proceeded to introduce the whole party.

"My name is Armand — Gustave Armand," the gentleman informed them, as though he considered it only right he should meet their friendly advances thus far at least. At the same time he handed Uncle Alvin his card.

Apparently he had become quite interested in the party, whom he could see were from the great country to the west of the Atlantic; and America is a land of considerable fascination and yearning to many millions of Old World people.

After he had been told how they were bound for various Continental countries on sight-seeing trips, Mr. Armand proceeded to inform them further of his own affairs.

"It happens that I, too, am bound for *La Belle France*, sir," he said to Uncle Alvin, "where just at present I have an important mission to fulfill. It would be very pleasant if a good fort : should throw us together somewhere there."

"I should be glad indeed to meet you again, Mr. Armand," returned Uncle Alvin. He really meant

every word of what he said. There was something peculiarly attractive about the new acquaintance, even though some of them afterwards gave it as their opinion that he seemed a little mysterious.

He was very cordial, and shook hands all around before tipping his hat as the most polite Frenchman might, and walking hastily away.

"Wouldn't it be strange if we should happen to meet him again over in France?" remarked Lucille, as she tripped along at the side of Mart Dorr and Thomas Bartlett.

"As much chance of finding a needle in a haystack as that happening, I should say," Mart declared; "though of course queer things do come along sometimes. I've heard of two men who were next door neighbors in New York for ten years, and only knew each other by sight, coming face to face on top of one of the pyramids in Egypt."

"Yes," continued Tom, laughingly, "and the chances are they were so glad to see a familiar face that those two men shook hands on the spot as though they had been life-long friends."

By this time they had arrived close to their hotel. The subject of the mysterious stranger seemed to be lingering in the minds of some of the travelers, for Henry Caslon was heard to say to Harvey Dorr:

"Do you know it wouldn't surprise me a little bit if our new friend turned out to be a Government

spy. Didn't he say he had to go over to France on a mission? And don't we hear lots of talk about German spies over in England, even if both countries are at peace? He looks just like what I'd picture a real foreign spy to be."

"Oh! that's owing to your bump of imagination, Henry, which they say is abnormally developed," Mart told him, carelessly. "He looks just like an average gentleman to me; and I reckon he's only an agent for some French automobile factory, trying to sell a big order for his firm over in Great Britain."

"He seemed a very pleasant gentleman to me," added Lucille, who with her brother Tom, was close enough behind to overhear the subject of their dialogue. Somehow this haphazard suggestion on the part of Henry Caslon sank deep in the mind of Tom Maillard. It was fated to recur many times to him in the near future, when he found himself on historic French territory.

Always the answer to that question, "who can Monsieur Armand be?" seemed to dance just before his grasp; just as a will-o'-the-wisp in lonely graveyards or marshy places keeps tantalizingly out of one's reach.

As soon as dinner had been dispatched the whole party took conveyances to the station to wish the Dorrs a hearty farewell.

They expected to start by train for the boat that was to carry them across the lower part of the

North Sea, direct to the city of Antwerp on the River Scheldt in Belgium.

As might be expected there was the usual merriment as they saw their friends enter the compartment that had been reserved for them, and after the guard had locked as well as closed the door.

Just before the train pulled out the last handshakes were exchanged amidst all manner of laughter and promises.

"Be saving of your spare cash and spending money so as to settle for that dinner when we meet again in Rome," warned Tom Maillard, crooking a finger at the scornful Harvey, who was leaning from a window and apparently holding that brown paper package in his hands, though they knew he was trying a parting snapshot.

"I'd advise you to take your own advice, because you'll need it," Harvey called back, as the train began to move off.

There were waving handkerchiefs from the carriage windows until those who remained in the station lost sight of the train back of other lines of cars. Although those who had thus started for the interesting country of Flanders anticipated having an enjoyable time there, of course they could not dream of the remarkable vicissitudes of fortune they were fated to endure before meeting these dear friends once more.

What those strange adventures were has been

told in the pages of the first volume of this series of war stories; and if you wish to follow the fortunes of Mart and Harvey Dorr, as well as learn what success the latter had with his cunningly concealed camera, you can do so by reading, "Between the Lines in Belgium."

Since they chanced to be caught in that country when war was suddenly declared by Germany, and the wonderful army of the Kaiser started across the neutral territory of Belgium in order to strike a swift blow at France, it can be understood that the Dorr boys must have encountered many thrilling adventures.

The rest of the party expected to start before nightfall, two for Hamburg, while the others headed for France. They had all their baggage ready, and being wise travelers carried as much with them as possible; since it is not as easy to send a trunk abroad as in our own country, no checks being given, and every one being expected to identify his own property from time to time.

"I'm afraid we're going to have a rough passage across the Channel to-night," Uncle Alvin told the rest as they once more headed for the station towards train time, having said good-by to the Bartletts, who were to make a start from another quarter.

The party was now reduced to just one-half of the original number, with Uncle Alvin in supreme

command. This position of authority afforded him plenty of opportunities for pretending to be a severe captain, when everybody knew he was the mildest and most lovable old fellow that could be imagined.

"What makes you say that, Uncle Alvin?" demanded Lucille, looking anything but pleased; for while she had not been very sick on the voyage across the Atlantic, she had heard terrible stories about that trip of a few hours on the Channel, where even old sailors often have to give up and admit that they feel squeamish.

"There are indications of bad weather, I understand," the old gentleman replied.

"Not a storm, I hope?" the girl continued, uneasily. "Oh! wouldn't it be too bad if after all we met with a shipwreck, just when we were within sight of the shores of beautiful France?"

Tom laughed the idea to scorn.

"Piffle!" he exclaimed, for occasionally Tom was known to indulge in certain forms of slang, though as a rule not addicted to the habit, because Lucille would not allow it; "that storm business is all moonshine. Why, the English Channel is only a little stretch of water at the best. They say on a clear day you can see the white cliffs of Dover from the French side. What's twenty miles? They've got big guns that can throw a shell almost that far."

All the same, the fact that it was a windy and gloomy night impressed some of the travelers un-

favorably. When later on, as they were about to board the steamer at Dover, they saw a party turning back, saying they would wait for the next boat, Lucille cast an uneasy look at her uncle.

"Do you suppose they are afraid it's going to be too stormy outside the harbor?" she asked him, at which the old gentleman smiled, and hastened to reply:

"Well, it might be they've decided to wait for smoother water; people often pick their time that way in crossing the Channel. But they may also have some other reason for changing their minds."

"Why, yes," broke in Paul Caslon, "I think I heard them speaking as though they were disappointed in some one not showing up here. I guess they mean to go to a hotel, and wait for him to come. No storm that blows could make me give up a trip, if the captain was willing to take the chances."

Paul had always been reckoned a regular water duck, and never suffered in the slightest degree from sea sickness. That kind of people never understand how others less fortunate feel when the vessel commences to reel upon a choppy sea.

So they went aboard, and made themselves as comfortable as the conditions allowed. It would only be for a short passage, and then they expected to be carried on to Paris, where the following morning would find them ready for more sight-seeing before the party finally broke up.

"Now we're off!" said Paul, joyfully, as the last commands were given, and the Channel steamer began to move away from her landing stage.

The young folks were all at the rail watching everything that went on; but Mrs. Caslon and Uncle Alvin, being experienced travelers, had discreetly found seats in the saloon cabin, where they could be comfortable, and resist the dreadful feeling they anticipated would soon be gripping them.

Even in the harbor it was anything but steady. Lucille showed that while she had always been reckoned an unusually brave girl, she was not a born sailor.

"It's getting worse all the while, don't you think?" she asked, as the boat began to rock violently, and some of the numerous passengers started to seek places where they could lie down, since they were less likely to suffer when in that position.

"Oh! it's a joke to hear you talk that way, when I'm just beginning to really enjoy things," said Paul Caslon. "Let the old wind blow, and crack its cheeks if it wants; and the seas roll as high as mountains, too. This is a bully little boat, all right, and she's stood some corks of storms in her day, they say."

"But she must be old now, and not nearly so well able to stand up against a st—— oh! dear, what a terrible lurch that was! Do you think she could have sprung a leak, Henry? That sometimes hap-

pens, I've read, when a ship's timbers are strained too hard. Is that sound I hear every once in a while the men manning the pumps?"

Paul acted as though he wanted to laugh louder than ever, but he saw that Lucille was really nervous, and he thought too much of Tom's pretty little sister to be rude.

"Well, so far as I know, Lucille," he told her, "I don't think they ever have to put the crew at the pumps on board a steamer while the donkey engine is able to do the work. And on nearly all boats they often keep taking the bilge water out of the hold. There's a certain amount of seepage all the time, you must understand. I wouldn't worry about it, Lucille."

"I'll never be satisfied unless I can get the captain to tell me himself that this isn't much of a storm," the girl continued, still holding on to her seat as though she feared she might be suddenly hurled overboard.

"It's a glorious sight to me," Paul declared, some time later; "we must be nearly half-way across by now, and just see how the big waves come smashing up against the side of the boat. Every one has a white mane on top just like horses rushing along. I wouldn't have missed this for a whole lot."

He seemed to be about the only passenger able to say this, for most of them were cowering here and there, and signs of distress abounded.

The captain on the bridge noticed the boy who stood and never seemed to tire of looking out over the heaving, darkened sea; and doubtless he told himself that there was a born sailor. At the same time he sent one of his officers to request that Paul keep away from the rail, as there was always a possibility of the deck being swept by a giant billow, that might carry him off.

Unfortunately Lucille was near enough to overhear this message, and it added to her distress of mind. She admitted that she was a little coward on the sea, although brave enough ashore. No horse had ever been too wild for her to mount; and Tom could have told of numerous occasions where his sister had shown a bravery calculated to arouse his enthusiastic admiration.

Yes, Lucille had been presented with a gold medal by a Humane Society because she had once upon a time saved the life of a small boy who had broken through the ice of a deep mill-pond. Lucille shivered now as she listened to the wind whistling past, and the great waves beating a loud tattoo against the side of the staunch steamer.

Perhaps it was not much of a storm to the grim captain up there on the bridge; but it had all the elements of terror to many of the unfortunate passengers.

Suddenly, without the slightest warning, there came a terrific shock, followed by a clamor of

shrieks from alarmed men and women, and the hoarse commands of the officers.

A scene of turmoil followed, as every one realized that there had been some sort of collision in the middle of the Channel,—in the darkness and the storm.

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTERIOUS COLLISION

“THERE, we’ve run into another vessel! And you laughed at me for being afraid. Go and see if we are sinking, Tom! Paul, get me a life preserver; but you stay with me, Henry!”

A little queen could not give orders to her willing slaves and secure more immediate results than Lucille did. Two of the boys darted off, while the shrieks and shouts all over the pitching vessel grew more clamorous.

At least the engines were keeping up their steady grind, for the throb of their pistons could be felt, and the steamer continued to keep her head in the direction of the French coast.

Lucille admitted that she shared the belief of most of the alarmed passengers, that they must surely be going down. After that one outburst, however, the girl managed to contain herself. She even spoke a few soothing words to a wretched woman who was carrying on as though wild with fright.

The captain and officers hurried here and there, while the little vessel was plunging on, sometimes almost burying her nose in the smothering billows that met them dead ahead.

“There is no need of alarm! Calm yourselves, we are in no danger! Fasten on the life belts if you will; but I give you my word there is no need! Everything is all right, friends. Be calm! By shouting you are only adding to the fright of the poor women passengers!”

As they continued to talk in this strain by degrees the officers induced the men to display reason. Already the crew had gathered around the boats, ready to prevent any mad attempt to lower them into that black gulf, where, ten chances to one, they would be immediately swamped.

A few frantic men and women had to be bodily hurled back, their one idea being that the steamer must surely be going down, and those first in the boats would have at least a chance to escape the general doom.

Paul came hurrying back. He had scooped up a number of life preservers, and the very first thing the boy did was to fasten one of these about Lucille. Although her hands trembled violently she managed to be of such assistance that the cork belt was soon secured.

“Now let me help you with yours, Paul,” the girl said, as she snatched up another of the life preservers; “and I hope you brought enough for every one! Oh! Uncle Alvin, let me fasten this around you. Do you think we will go down right away? Tom, have

you found out all about it; and did the other poor vessel founder?"

Uncle Alvin, as usual, was not to be panic-stricken. Where others were seeing only the black side of things he sturdily maintained that there was really no danger.

"It's going to be all right," he told them, waving Lucille and the life belt aside. "No, I will not put one on, because it only adds to the general alarm. You hear what the captain is saying? He says there's no cause for any fear; that the vessel isn't leaking a drop. I must hurry and find your mother, Paul; she will be distracted, I fear. Keep together, and try to quiet some of these poor people."

With that Uncle Alvin hurried away. In a great emergency like this he was like the Rock of Gibraltar with his sublime faith in everything coming out right. There could be no telling how much his confident demeanor did to soothe the alarmed passengers.

By degrees the panic grew less. Women sobbed now instead of shrieking, and the voices of men were heard in comforting words, rather than abusive threats toward the staunch crew guarding the boats, because they refused to let these be lowered.

"Well, that was a terrible experience," said Henry Caslon, as the little party kept as well out

of the way of the flying spray from the bow of the pitching boat as they could. "What do you suppose we struck, Tom?"

"That's what everybody is asking," came the reply; "and I warrant you right now that bunch of excitable Frenchmen over there are disputing about it. Look at them making all manner of gestures, will you? Lucille, can you understand what they are saying?"

The girl listened to the swift flow of words for a short time, and then she laughed softly; which was a pretty good sign that she must have recovered from her little fright, even though she was still trembling.

"Oh! they are very much in earnest," she told the three boys. "Each seems to be so sure his theory is the correct one; and they are backing it up in all sorts of ways. I never knew that Frenchmen could be so ingenious."

"Tell us what they think, won't you, Lucille?" begged Paul. "That's what a fellow gets for coming abroad without picking up a smattering of the language. Now, I know some German, which I hope will help us out when we're in the Austrian Tyrol, but French is like Hebrew to me."

"That tall man with the peaked beard is saying we must have collided with some vessel trying to cross our path," Lucille explained; "and that it went down with all aboard. He declares he cer-

tainly heard the cries of the poor passengers before the sea swallowed them up; but the others tell him it must have been the shriek of the storm, and the cries aboard our own boat."

"How about the little man who jumps about so much — the one who wears that queer high hat?" asked Tom.

"His idea is we struck some floating log or piece of a wreck," the girl continued; "and that it is the greatest luck in the world our vessel wasn't smashed in the bow when we hit it head on. He says he heard the captain tell that to some passengers."

"I guess he's about right, too," muttered Tom; but so low that none of the others paid any attention to what he was saying. He caught himself just in time, as though he had learned more during his little tour of investigation than he thought it prudent to tell.

"But there's a third French passenger in the bunch, Lucille," Paul observed, being quite persistent; "he looks as if he thought he knew all about it. When he tells the others something they seem to be staggered, and shrug their shoulders like everything. Now I reckon he must have hit on an explanation that beats theirs all hollow?"

"It surely does," replied Lucille, as though amused. "He declares there can be no doubt about it that we struck one of those German submarine war craft, which he says are constantly pok-

ing around in the Channel, trying to pick up valuable information about currents, shore lines, and all sorts of things that might be useful in case there *was* a war; but which are unpardonable breaches of etiquette in times of peace."

"Oh! these French will never forgive the Germans for taking away their provinces," said Henry, who was a great reader. "The feeling of hostility crops out in a thousand ways, I understand. As if a submarine would come to the surface while this wild storm was on! But I suppose all the argument in the world wouldn't convince that man with the big imagination."

"He says he only hopes it was a German submarine, and that we sent it to the bottom of the Channel, never to come up again," Lucille finished.

"It seems to me they do nothing but talk war over on this side," Henry remarked. "In England it's about the way Germany keeps on boosting her navy, and toasting 'The Day,' which everybody knows means the time when the German navy will meet the British in battle on the sea and defeat them."

"Yes," added Tom, "and in France we'll hear the Triple Entente toasted, with sly hints of the approaching time when they expect to snatch back their lost provinces from Germany."

"I expect," Henry told them, "in Austria to hear nothing talked of but the dangers lurking in

the Balkans. You know how just a little while ago the heir of the Austrian throne and his wife were murdered in Bosnia, and that it is said a crazy Servian did it."

"Yes," said Tom, chiming in, "and they believe he was put up to it by some persons high up in the Servian military service. Austria is boiling over with rage; and Uncle Alvin says Servia will have to get down on her knees pretty soon, and make amends."

"Well, it's too bad all these things are happening just when we've crossed the Atlantic on a vacation jaunt," Lucille lamented. "This promised to be the event of a life-time for all of us. Wouldn't it be terrible if war did break out, and spoil our whole trip?"

"Uncle Alvin laughs at such a thing happening," said Henry; "and he ought to know these people pretty well, because he's been a great traveler in his day. He says it will be the same old story — Austria and Germany will make a big bluster, and rattle the sword in the scabbard a while, with all sorts of horrible threats; then Russia will induce Servia to do whatever is demanded, and so the incident will be closed. Uncle Alvin knows all about it; you can depend on what he says."

But Uncle Alvin was like a good many other wise people, who judged the immediate future by the past. The cry of "Wolf!" had been uttered once

too often; this time the peril to the peace of Europe was genuine.

By degrees the excitement aboard the Channel boat died away, so that even the crying of nervous women and children had ceased. Ensconced in their retreat where they could avoid the flying spray and the danger of an occasional billow coming aboard, the four young people counted the passing minutes, finding considerable satisfaction in the thought that every one was taking them nearer port.

Tom left them several times, and on coming back and being questioned, explained that he was merely "taking a look around."

Finally through the blackness beyond they sighted a friendly light, which they heard an officer say marked the entrance to Calais Harbor. Upon hearing this Tom was observed to exhibit considerable relief.

"You've been keeping something from us, Tom," exclaimed Lucille, who knew her brother better than either of the others could. "I've been watching you for some time, and could see that you were anxious. I believe you learned more than you chose to tell us, when you went to see if any damage had been done to our steamer."

"Own up, Tom," pursued Paul; "we're safe now in port, and the danger is past. Was there a

bad leak; and have they kept the engine working all this while to save us from foundering?"

"I reckon there's no harm in my telling you now," Tom admitted, lowering his voice as he confessed, since he did not wish others to hear what he said. "It's as you thought, Paul; whatever we hit there in the middle of the Channel, it knocked some sort of hole in our bow. Right now we are a lot lower in the water than when we started."

"Oh! mercy!" exclaimed Lucille, in dismay, "and if the Channel was a hundred miles across instead of only twenty or so, we would go down!"

"Just as like as not," replied Tom, coolly; for since the peril was of the past he no longer felt that terrible weight resting on his shoulders.

How eagerly did they see the lights showing up ahead, and understand that all chance of the steamer foundering was now set at rest, for soon she would be at her dock, when they could go ashore.

Often in other days would their thoughts go back to that stormy night on the English Channel, and the shock that came to them when their steamer collided with some unknown object, escaping almost by a miracle the fate that has befallen many a noble vessel.

All of them felt a great relief when finally they set foot on the soil of France; the solid ground had possibly never before felt so good.

CHAPTER IV

THE MAN OF THE HOUR

“So you think, Tom, we’ll be able to get away from Paris to-morrow, and start for the North of France in our automobile?” Lucille was saying just three days after they had landed at Calais, after the rough passage from England.

The Caslons had spent two of these in their company, looking over the gay French capital. They had now gone on to Austria, and the three Mailards were left to carry out their proposed plan of a tour through the many interesting districts up in the northern provinces bordering on Belgium, Luxemburg and Germany.

“That’s what Uncle Alvin says,” her brother replied, hopefully; “and I’m glad it’s all fixed at last. But we certainly have had a great time getting around here in Paris. I’ll never forget the things I’ve seen.”

“Yes,” added Lucille, as she looked out of the hotel window at the bustling crowds, “and particularly those awful catacombs under the city. How fortunate it was we happened to be here on just the one day a month they permit people to enter there, and explore the places where all those heaps of

bones lie. Every time I look at my fragment of candle I'll remember that sight. We must have walked miles and miles under the streets of the city."

"Yes, and there was that trip uncle and I took in a boat through the big sewers of Paris," her brother added; "that was an experience worth while, let me tell you. Now about that tour, he says he has chartered a fine big car, and secured an experienced chauffeur, French of course, who's been all over the ground more than a few times."

"Oh! I'm glad of that," Lucille observed, "because somehow I've had a little fear we might get lost up there; or follow the wrong roads and be mired in a swamp over night perhaps."

"Well, what if that did happen, we would always carry enough things along with us so as not to starve, or be cold. Plenty of room in a touring car for heaps of blankets, and even cooking things, if you want."

"I hope our driver will be a nice man," ventured Lucille, "because you know lots of the pleasure of a trip like this depends on how he acts. I've seen chauffeurs who were so ugly-tempered they took away all the fun of the thing. You kept shivering most of the time for fear they'd get in a temper, and run the car over some bank, or into a stone wall, just for spite."

"Oh! Uncle Alvin says he believes Andre will be

a real good sort of fellow," Tom hastened to assure her.

"Then his name is Andre? That's a nice name," Lucille continued; "and I hope he turns out just as fine. Andre what, Tom?"

"Andre Duval, which is a pretty classy name for a chauffeur, I should say. But Uncle Alvin says he comes of a good family, though they are just now in reduced circumstances. The one thing that bothers me is all this silly war talk."

"Do you hear much of it among the English and Americans in our hotel?" she asked, showing considerable concern.

"They seem to talk of little else," replied Tom, frowning. "It seems that Austria has just made a demand on Servia that is mighty harsh. If Servia refuses to comply with all the conditions, then her big neighbor declares she will invade her territory and wipe her out."

"Oh! but that is hardly fair, because Servia would be only a bite to Austria; it is so small a nation," Lucille told him, with the natural American liking for fair play.

"Yes, but those Servians are terrible fighters, and they never seem to know when they are whipped," continued the boy, with considerable enthusiasm, for like all his type he greatly admired heroism wherever found.

"I do hope it will all blow over by the time we

get started," Lucille sighed, as she contemplated all the delightful prospects before them, which would be seriously disturbed, if not altogether ruined, should the war flame break out.

"Of course Uncle Alvin keeps on saying it'll end in a puff of smoke," Tom told her, reassuringly; "and he ought to know better than a boy like me. Only lots of people are taking it seriously; and you ought to hear what they are saying about what France and Russia, backed by Great Britain, would do to the Kaiser if he did draw the sword."

"Why, even the chambermaid who looks after our rooms was telling me that her sweetheart, who of course belongs to the reserve army, received warning to hold himself ready to join the colors at any hour. And I must say that looks pretty serious, no matter what Uncle Alvin thinks."

"It sure does," Tom assented.

"It's about the time we promised to meet uncle, and take that walk along the avenue," remarked Lucille; "there are a few things I want to see, and if we leave Paris to-morrow this may be my last chance. Come, let's be going, Tom."

Tom may have had an idea that he would much prefer to visit certain other places in Paris where interesting sights awaited the tourist, but he knew that his uncle would not wish him to wander off by himself. So making the best of a bad bargain he accompanied Lucille down to the lobby of the hotel,

where sure enough the little old gentleman awaited them.

They were soon sauntering along one of the gayest thoroughfares in all Paris. It was a charming summer afternoon, and one would never dream that the shadow of war rested on the land to see the throngs of well dressed and apparently happy people upon the boulevards and avenues.

There were always many things to be seen, so that Lucille kept up an almost constant stream of talk, asking questions which Uncle Alvin answered as best he might, and calling attention to this odd spectacle, or that magnificent building.

"Oh! there is Mr. Armand, I do believe; over by the curb talking to that army officer sitting in that military car!" she suddenly exclaimed.

Both her companions immediately looked, doubtless under the impression that she must surely be mistaken; but Tom was quick to confirm her statement.

"Just who it is, as sure as anything," he said. "The same gentleman who pulled Uncle Alvin out from before that motor 'bus on the Strand in London. He told us he was coming over to France, you remember, Lucille. And say, he must be somebody of consequence, because that's an officer pretty high up, I should think, if you notice his medals and decorations, as well as his fine military air."

"And look how people all seem to bow so politely

as they pass by," continued the girl. "I expect he's well known, and a high favorite with the Paris crowds."

"That is General Joffre, the idol of all France, and the real commander-in-chief of the army of the Republic," said Uncle Alvin, turning toward the young people. "If a war should break out he will be the man of the hour over here. Evidently our friend, to whom I am so deeply indebted, is personally acquainted with the famous general. As you say, it shows that M. Armand must be a person of some consequence."

"There, he has looked this way, and I think he must have recognized us!" said Lucille, with more or less excitement; and then she added: "Now he has shaken hands with the general, and turns away. Oh! Uncle, I do believe he means to come over and speak to us again."

"Which would be very kind of him indeed," the other remarked, with a smile; "but I could see that M. Armand was rather taken with our lively crowd of young Americans. He meant it when he said he hoped to meet us over here."

A minute later the grave gentleman was shaking hands with each one of the little party. His eyes betrayed his pleasure at seeing them again.

"So you have come to Paris, and seem to be enjoying your visit," he remarked, as he stood with them on the pavement of the avenue; while the oc-

cupant of the military car moved along, answering the continual salutes of the crowds.

"Yes, all our friends have gone their several ways," replied Uncle Alvin; "some to Belgium, others to Germany, and the last lot to the Austrian Tyrol. We expect to leave on our automobile tour in the morning."

"Ah! yes," observed M. Armand, a little shadow, Tom noticed, coming across his forehead as he spoke. "I remember your telling me how you had laid out a delightful trip through the Northern provinces, where some of your people came from, a few generations back. You expect to have a fine time looking up places connected with those old days, of course?"

"Yes," the old gentleman assured him, eagerly; "I have wanted to make this trip for a long while, but other things interfered. These young people anticipate having a glorious time for the next month or six weeks, when school duties will force us to return home. We are pleased to have met you again, M. Armand. Pardon me, but was that General Joffre we saw you conversing with just now?"

"Yes, the one man in whom France has the utmost confidence, and the most beloved of all her commanders," replied the other hastily. "Everybody knows him, and in spite of his position he is exceedingly democratic. Even an humble individ-

ual like myself could find an opportunity to chat for a few minutes with him, since it happens that we have known each other for some years."

"He looked to me like the right sort of man for his position," said Uncle Alvin, "and I've seen pretty much all the noted military commanders of the last thirty years, from the older Von Moltke down to the present."

"Ah! yes, France may have cause to congratulate herself before long that she is fortunate enough to have such a man in charge of her armies," the other ventured to say; at which of course, recognizing the hint behind the words, Uncle Alvin sought further information.

"Then you fear that something serious may come of all this war bluster and talk, do you, monsieur?" he asked.

"It would not surprise me," he was told, cautiously, as though the other did not want to say too much. "I give you my word for it the French authorities are not wholly asleep. Everything depends on what Austria will do with the answer which Serbia must soon send her. If she chooses to strain a point, the black shadow will pass over."

"And if not?" further questioned the American traveler.

"Then there will be war, the greatest and most frightful war in the history of the world," he was told, with a shrug of the shoulders.

“And Germany?” continued Uncle Alvin.

“Is bound to back her ally up to the limit, Mr. Maillard. That would mean a declaration of war upon Russia, and quickly following, upon poor France as well. If only Great Britain does not fail to do her part, France will welcome the chance to pay back the long-standing score she owes Germany. But then, as I said, it is all uncertain at this hour. We may not know for a week what is coming. But if war is forced upon France it will be brought about as suddenly almost as the lightning darts from the cloud. I wish you were going south instead of north.” (See Note 1.)*

“That would change our plans, and we could not think of that,” said the other, as confident as ever that the trouble would all pass away. “We expect to keep in touch with events as they happen; and if the prospect gets too threatening, why Paris will be only a couple of days’ journey away in a good car.”

“Well, I sincerely trust you will come out all right,” the other continued. “My personal mission does not progress as well as I could wish. I am endeavoring to secure signatures to a paper from two Frenchmen who, I have reason to believe, are now in the regular army. So it is barely possible, my good friends, that by rare good luck we may happen to come across each other again, somewhere, sometime, if we are all heading north. Un-

* For notes see end of volume.

til such time, which I shall anticipate with pleasure, I must say adieu."

He shook hands with each one in turn, and walked away. Lucille and Tom looked after him, and the latter expressed what was in his mind when he said to his sister: "That's the most mysterious man I ever met, and I shouldn't be surprised if Henry Caslon hit the mark when he said he guessed Mr. Armand must be a military spy or a secret agent."

CHAPTER V

A STOP AT THE INN

ON the late afternoon of the second day after that meeting on the boulevard of Paris a big touring car drove up to the inn of a town in the north of France, among the hills of that picturesque region.

Beside the French chauffeur sat Tom Maillard, while Uncle Alvin and his lively little niece occupied the tonneau, together with quite a collection of belongings calculated to add to the comfort of the journey.

"We've had a great day of it," Lucille was saying, in her customary happy way, as she jumped out, and then turned to assist the old gentleman, who naturally felt more or less stiff after sitting so many hours.

"And I rather like the looks of this inn, too," remarked Tom, sniffing the air as a hungry dog might when approaching the camp fire at which supper was being prepared. "I rather think they'll give us something good to eat, to start with. And then there's an air about the whole place that speaks well for its being clean."

They had been very fortunate thus far on the

trip, not having suffered any delay worth mentioning. One little blowout was the extent of the damage done, and now the outlook was fine, since a new shoe had been placed upon the offending wheel.

Andre Duval, the French chauffeur, seemed to know his business thoroughly. He handled the big car in the dexterous fashion that French drivers always exhibit. Tom was only provoked because, having to sit alongside Andre, his lack of knowledge of the French language prevented him from doing much talking. The driver seemed to be just about as badly off when it came to speaking English, so what little communication they had must be by means of signs, and gestures and shrugs.

Lucille, of course, could air her French from time to time, with fair success, although Tom told her more than once that Andre had to make a guess at what she meant to convey.

"This is as pretty a place as any we've seen so far," Lucille told her brother, as they sauntered about, taking note of the green hills, the cultivated fields, and the general air of thrift that pervaded the town and its surroundings.

The chauffeur was working at his car, for there seemed always something that needed attention whenever they stopped for a time. Uncle Alvin had gone up on the porch and was resting in a comfortable chair.

"Yes, and I should think there might be a chance

of getting some game up in those woods yonder," Tom remarked, showing that his thoughts ran in that sort of groove, while his sister's mind was taken up with the scenery.

"How about that war scare, Tom; do you know whether uncle has heard anything lately about it? I'm worried more than ever now, since Mr. Armand spoke the way he did. If the Germans did invade France all this country up here that I've been admiring so much would suffer dreadfully."

"Just what it would," replied Tom, "and it would be a shame too, when the people seem to be so contented and happy. I asked uncle about it, and he said that at last accounts Servia hadn't made her answer yet, but that Austria had threatened the little nation with an ultimatum."

"I suppose that means that unless she gives an answer right away, and of a kind Austria can accept, the big bully will start to punish Servia and then the whole of Europe must be plunged into war. Oh! I wish it was settled. I can't sleep right nights; it's getting on my nerves, Tom — it really is."

"Shucks! we've got mighty little to bother us, sis," Tom told her, in his careless boyish way; "when we get word that it's coming, all we have to do is to order Andre to head for Paris, and away we'll tear over these fine roads, to reach there in a hurry."

"Our trip will be ruined," she mourned.

"Oh! trust uncle to fix up another one for us. I saw him looking over some maps and folders of Spain this morning; and it wouldn't surprise me to learn he had laid out a tour through that country, if we have to skip out of this."

"But all the same, Tom, that wouldn't be dear France, where all our ancestors came from, you know," Lucille continued.

"Oh! don't cross a bridge till you come to it," Tom told her. "That's what I call borrowing trouble. Plenty of things to knock you in this world without going out of your way to hunt for 'em. As for me, I'm going to keep right along getting as much fun out of the game as I can, and enjoying my three good meals a day. Whew! but something they're getting ready for supper does smell mighty fine; I hope we won't have to hold out a great while longer before they call us in."

"That's just like a boy — always thinking of eating," laughed his sister.

"Huh! I notice that you don't let anything good get past you when we're sitting at the festive board," he told her. "Boys may do more talking about their being half-starved and all that; but some girls I know can hold their own when it comes to a showdown."

"Now, don't be personal, Tom, because it isn't nice. I was just wondering how all the others are

getting on by now — the Dorrs, the Bartletts, and the Caslons.”

Undoubtedly, wise Lucille made this remark partly in order to change the subject; and in this she seemed to be successful, for Tom said in reply:

“Do you know, I’ve been picturing poor Harvey looking out between the bars of a Black Hole in Antwerp or Brussels, where he’s been thrown when the military authorities caught him sneaking photographs of their forts and defensive secrets. You heard me warn him, didn’t you, sis? I kind of guess Harv will have some stories to tell worth hearing when we see him again.”

“Now I look at it the other way,” Lucille asserted. “Harvey is too smart a boy to let himself be caught taking those forbidden photographs. He had fixed his little camera too cute for anything; and the most suspicious soldier would never dream that brown paper package looking like luncheon held a picture-taking machine.”

“There’s the supper call!” cried Tom, immediately commencing to hurry toward the inn, as though he felt a horrible dread that unless he got into his chair promptly he might find himself left out.

It seemed that there were a number of other guests at the inn, and all of them sat at one long table, where they were helped by the proprietor and

his daughter. Just as wise Tom had predicted, everything was as neat and clean about the place as could be; and the food that was served to them had an appetizing flavor such as few save French cooks know how to impart.

One man did not seem to have much to say. He was a red-faced, stout individual, who ate ravenously, and hardly looked up from his plate. Once when he said something to the girl who was waiting on him Tom was surprised to hear him speak in German, and then follow with a French word, as though he might have forgotten himself.

He left the table before any of the others, however, being a quick eater. And after he had gone Tom noticed that the other three guests, who may have been commercial travelers from Paris, selling their wares in this northern town, seemed to be discussing the stout man.

"What are they saying about him, sis?" Tom asked in a low tone, his curiosity getting the better of him; "because I've noticed that you were listening to them talk, for all you looked down at your plate. I spoke to you twice, and you didn't seem to hear me."

"Why, I couldn't help hearing what they said," Lucille explained, turning a little red with confusion, since she did not like to be known as an eavesdropper; "for they didn't make any effort to tone down their voices, knowing he had gone out."

"Then they *have* been talking about that red-faced man, just as I expected?" Tom continued, with a touch of triumph in his voice. "Who and what is he? I heard him say something that sounded like German to that girl."

"He is a German, Herr Mattbaum by name," Lucille replied. "They were telling the new man who has just arrived from Paris how he came here last spring with a rich capitalist from up on the Rhine, named Herr Kluck. They had heard much about the abandoned quarries near this town, and wanted to look them over. It ended in the purchase of the quarries by a German syndicate."

"And they have been working them since; and this man must be the manager, then?" Tom observed, as though immediately losing interest in the matter, since it had turned out to be such a commonplace thing.

"Oh! but it happens that they had no idea of quarrying stone," Lucille told him, cautiously. "You see, there are many dark caves about the quarries, and it was with the idea of starting a big mushroom farm that they bought them."

"Why, yes, of course, I know mushrooms are always grown in the dark, caves and cellars being used to start the spawn," Tom admitted. "And, say, that was a crackerjack of a scheme, now, wasn't it? So the enterprising German firm took them over; and I reckon they've been working to get

their crop growing ever since. Our friend with the red face is a mushroom grower, is he? ”

Although Tom never suspected it at that time, the scheme turned out to be of greater magnitude than he or any other person ever dreamed; indeed, when the actual truth came out later on, and the world knew what that small army of German imported workmen had been doing in those same quarries all these months, the facts seemed almost incredible, they were so astounding.

When the German army retreated from before Paris, those same quarries afforded them the most admirable fortifications that could be imagined. It is said that foundations for their great guns were ready prepared, such had been the wonderful forethought shown by the German Military Government.

There are many who to this day believe that the German Herr Kluck who conducted negotiations for the purchase of the abandoned quarries, and General von Kluck, the commander of the German army that rushed toward Paris, were one and the same person.

Uncle Alvin, who could talk French, as well as several other languages, had evidently been listening also to what the commercial travelers were saying. If he thought anything at all about the matter, it was only to conclude that when it came to invading other countries, and starting business enterprises, the Germans were about as pushing as the

next one. "Made in Germany" he had found on all sorts of implements and articles all over the known world.

"I suppose we'll be going on again in the morning," Tom remarked, as they left the table; "well, I'll be glad enough for some things, and sorry about others."

"Yes," said Lucille slyly, guessing what was in his thoughts, "they do know how to serve a good meal here, that's right, Tom."

Tom sauntered off by himself. Uncle Alvin had again sought that easy chair on the porch, where he could enjoy a quiet smoke after a good dinner. Lucille was trying to write a letter to some girl friend across the ocean, with whom she expected to keep up a one-sided correspondence while touring France.

It was beginning to grow dusk, though the twilight lasted long at this season of the year. Around him Tom could hear all manner of sounds such as were apt to be met with in a peaceful French town on a summer evening.

Sweet-toned vesper bells had some time back told of the fact that they were in a country where the peasants were deeply religious by nature and education. From beyond the confines of the town came the sound of lowing herds on their way home from distant pastures. Dogs barked, and children

playing nearby added their shrill voices to the general chorus.

Tom Maillard did not mean to go away from the near vicinity of the inn. Not that there was any possible danger of his meeting with lawless characters, for he had reason to believe that these country folk were all peaceful and honest, paying attention to their daily toil, and not troubling themselves concerning the affairs of others.

After a little stroll, just to get the "kinks out of his legs," as Tom told himself, he was once more approaching the inn, this time from the rear, having made a circuit during his walk.

A little group of men seemingly in earnest conversation attracted the attention of the boy. When he looked again he suddenly discovered that one of the trio was their chauffeur, Andre Duval. Tom began to feel a queer sensation that might even be called apprehension, when he took note of the fact that the other two men were rather suspicious looking characters.

CHAPTER VI

TROUBLE BEGINS

"I WONDER who they are, and what Andre is talking with them about?" Tom asked himself, as he watched.

He admitted that it was curious, since Andre had certainly never mentioned the fact that he knew any one in this northern French town. He could hardly have had time to finish his work on the car, and get his supper; yet here he was volubly discussing something with a couple of strangers, whose looks did not please Tom any too much.

Curious would hardly describe the facts, and the boy was more inclined to use a much stronger word — suspicious.

What did they know about Andre, after all? It was true he had come to them well recommended, and seemed to be up in his business as thoroughly as any chauffeur might, but then that was begging the question.

Was he honest? Could he be relied on in an emergency? Doubtless he had guessed before this that the elderly American was a wealthy man, traveling for pleasure, and able to afford almost any

luxury. Uncle Alvin was just such a prize as any clever, unscrupulous rascal might plan to pluck.

Were these other men scoundrels? Why did they keep glancing, apprehensively, Tom thought, toward the inn? Uncle Alvin might still be sitting there on the porch, for it was not yet fully dark, and the air mild. They must be talking of him, and how easy it would be for Andre to lead his unsuspecting little party into some sort of trap!

Tom had read more or less about Italian, Spanish and Balkan bandits, and how it was a favorite game with them to capture some rich person, whom they would hold for a heavy ransom.

"Great Jupiter!" he muttered to himself, as he felt a peculiar shiver pass over him. "What if we were caged that way, and kept prisoner in some of those horrible quarry pits that German company is using to grow mushrooms in?"

The mere thought appalled him. He stared harder than ever toward the spot where the three men were conversing so earnestly.

"Looks to me like those two thugs might be trying to convince our chauffeur it would be to his interest to join in with them. There they go plucking at his sleeve again, and Andre shakes his head as though he might be holding back. Now he's pointing to where our car stands. I wonder if they want him to steal that? Gee whiz! but this is getting on my nerves, all right."

Tom wondered what he ought to do. There was Uncle Alvin, to be sure; but as Tom very well knew, the mild-mannered old gentleman had such great faith in human nature that it would be next to impossible to convince him of the treachery of their accomplished chauffeur.

"He'd just laugh at me, and read me a lecture on thinking ill of people," grumbled the boy. "All these things that look so ugly to me uncle would dismiss with a wave of his hand, by telling me they were as innocent as could be, and that Andre had only run across some old friends of his."

There was only Lucille left. True, Lucille was a girl, but many times in the past she had proved that she could be relied on to furnish as good a set of nerves as any chum Tom had ever had. Indeed, outside of her dread for the sea, Tom knew of nothing that could cause Lucille to show the white feather.

"She's as good a pal as a fellow would want, for a fact," he told himself, while trying to figure out what he should do; "the only thing is if I tell her about Andre's queer actions it'll give sis a bad inning. She's come to think he's as reliable as they make them."

Just then the three men turned away. Tom felt a new cause for alarm.

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish," he continued to tell himself, as though getting at least a little satis-

faction in that way; "they're heading straight for the car, as sure as shooting. Now I wonder if that precious pair want Andre to let them chase off with it; and what ought I to do if they try such a game?"

The boy was worked up to an almost feverish pitch by now. He even mentally groaned to remember how really helpless he was, should anything untoward occur.

"All I could do, I suppose, would be to yell out; and much they'd care about my whoop. But now they're looking the car over, and Andre is explaining something about it. Perhaps they don't mean to run it off so boldly; it would be just as easy to wait for us at some place agreed on, where they wouldn't be seen and recognized."

He was so thoroughly convinced that there was something wrong about these mysterious actions of their chauffeur, that Tom would not relax his vigilance until he had seen the three men walk hastily away.

The last he saw of them they were still talking earnestly. Tom felt sure they had all the customary earmarks of dark conspirators. He recalled everything he had in times past read along those lines, and was quite settled in his mind Andre must be in the power of those bad men, who were forcing him to betray his employer.

A sudden brilliant idea came to Tom. When-

ever he had an inspiration like this it always seemed to flash into his mind, just as the lightning darts from a cloud.

"That might prevent them from running off with the car, anyway," he muttered, as he hurried over to where the big touring automobile stood, with its top raised so as to keep the dew off the seats, for it was to stay out all night.

It was Tom's idea to remove some important part of the engine, so that it could not be run again until this was restored. With his knowledge of mechanics it would be the simplest thing in the world to accomplish this, and in such a way that the chauffeur would not suspect anything until he came to start the car.

"I can slip out early in the morning and replace it," Tom satisfied himself by saying; "and even if Andre does discover what I've done, I'll just say I was afraid *somebody* might try a joy ride with our machine while we were all asleep, so I settled that thing in my own way."

He pretended to be fussing around the car. If Uncle Alvin had been able to see him from the porch where he sat he would not have considered it at all odd; because Tom was one of those boys who like to handle anything in the way of machinery. He was a natural mechanic, and meant to take up a technical course when he entered college.

Once or twice while the boy was hovering over

the car he thought he heard low voices approaching. At such times his heart would flutter with sudden excitement as he speculated on how he must act should Andre and those two conspirators suddenly appear alongside, and discover what he had been doing.

Perhaps it was only the effect of a lively imagination after all, for no one appeared to interrupt him. And when he had managed to secrete the important little connection belonging to the engine, the boy breathed easier.

"Now, if they get away with our car after all my trouble, I can't help it," he muttered, as he swung around so as to approach the house again.

His next move would be to find Lucille, and he remembered that the last he had seen of his sister she was writing at one end of the porch, where a table stood.

Yes, he could see that she was still there, though the evening shadows had fallen so heavily by this time that she no longer bent over her letter. In fact, Lucille seemed to be standing in an attitude of expectancy, and Tom rather fancied she must have detected his approach.

The boy fancied he had a rather disagreeable task before him. Lucille might not look at things through his eyes, and she had a mind of her own, too.

"Whether she laughs at me for thinking Andre

means to play us false or not," Tom was saying to himself as he slowly advanced toward his sister, "I'm not going to fix up that engine again to-night. Andre will never dream there's a thing wrong unless he tries to steal away. Then in the morning, before he shows up, I can make it all square again in a jiffy."

He had arrived at the steps leading to the porch by now. The first thing he noticed was that Uncle Alvin had gone in, possibly thinking the night air might not be the best thing for a gentleman of his age, subject to twinges of rheumatism.

Then Tom, looking at Lucille again, fancied she seemed worried.

"I wonder could anything have happened to uncle while I was walking around?" was the natural thought that flashed into the boy's mind.

Uncle Alvin, good natured and lovable that he was, occasionally had bad spells at unexpected times. We have already seen how one of these came very near causing an accident while he was crossing a London thoroughfare, at the time they made the acquaintance of M. Armand, the affable if mysterious gentleman.

This thought caused Tom to quicken his steps. If anything did happen to their uncle it would spell disaster to their delightful tour. But then this was not the main thing that gave Tom his uneasy feeling, because he entertained a genuine affection for

the old gentleman, and would have grieved sincerely in case anything befell him.

In another moment he had reached the side of Lucille, to have her put a hand on his arm, and while her eyes sparkled with excitement say:

“ Oh! Tom, I’m so glad you’ve come. I was just going to hunt you up. Something so strange has happened; and somehow I’m afraid it is going to upset all our plans! ”

CHAPTER VII

THE TERRIBLE NEWS

"WAIT a second, Lucille; you knock me out when you talk like that!" Tom managed to gasp, staggered when the tables were so suddenly turned on him.

"But I don't see why you should feel that way?" Lucille told him, impatiently, as though disturbed at his manner.

"It's because you've taken the wind out of my sails," the boy hurriedly declared; "for I was just coming to tell you about something queer I saw and ask you what you thought of it. But go on and tell me, Lucille; what could have happened while you were here on the inn porch? I hope it doesn't mean uncle has had a sudden bad turn?"

"Oh! no, nothing of that sort, Tom, thank goodness!" the girl quickly informed him, which fact must have relieved Tom considerably.

"Then hurry and tell me!" he persisted, with the impatience of a spoiled brother.

"Why, you see," Lucille began, "I was sitting here, trying to finish my letter to Doris Paine before it got too dark, when all at once I heard some one hurry up on the porch."

"Was uncle still in his chair?" interrupted Tom.

"No, he called a little while before that he thought he had better go indoors, and advised me to follow suit; but I knew the air was too balmy to hurt me, so I told him I'd come before very long. When I looked up, thinking it might be you hurrying to tell me something you had found out, I saw that it was a stranger."

"A man, of course, Lucille?"

"Yes, and he went right in the taproom of the inn, where the proprietor was doing something, having lighted the lamps. And, Tom, just as soon as this stranger had said something to him you ought to have seen how wildly excited the innkeeper became. He put his hand to his head, and I thought at first he was going to faint, for he sank right back in a chair."

"Bad news of some kind," muttered Tom.

"Did you see the stranger hand him any telegram?"

"No, he simply said something that came like a bullet, for it knocked the other over just as you would a partridge you fired at. Then, as I watched through this window here, I saw them commence to talk excitedly. The innkeeper was as white as a ghost. He seemed to be trembling as though he had received the greatest shock of his life. Some other men who were in the taproom, one of them wearing soldier's clothes, were beckoned over, and

joined the group. Then all of them talked in low voices. It was terribly exciting, and my heart pounded like a hammer."

Tom hardly knew what to think. Strange things seemed to be going on all around, to mystify and alarm them.

"Look in for yourself, Tom!" Lucille advised, upon seeing how bewildered he seemed; at the same time pushing him toward the nearby window, from which light escaped through the thin curtain that fluttered in the evening air.

Yes, there was an excited group at the further end of the long taproom. Four, five, six, Tom counted in all. They were listening to something a man whom Tom had not seen before was saying very earnestly. The one in the garb of a French zouave seemed to be laughing as though pleased, which Tom thought very strange.

Just then, as Tom looked, it chanced that the stout, red-faced German whom they noticed at the supper table, and whose name they had learned was Herr Mattbaum, entered the taproom. Immediately every eye seemed to be focused on him, and as if by a preconcerted signal the earnest conversation stopped.

The stout German picked up a newspaper, and giving the group a queer look, passed once more from the room. Then again the vigorous discussion broke out, accompanied by all manner of ex-

pressive shrugs, and movements of the hands, after the French fashion.

Tom turned toward his sister again. The mystery was too much for him to fathom off-hand. Lucille was watching his face as she could see it by the aid of the light that escaped from the interior of the taproom.

"Don't you see how terribly in earnest they all seem, Tom?" she asked, eagerly.

"I guess it must have been something pretty serious that came to our landlord, sure enough," he told her.

"Yes, but see the others, too; even those pleasant men we took for commercial drummers act as though they are as deeply interested as the inn-keeper. Both of them were just handing him money, as if they had received a sudden recall, and wanted to settle their bill. Oh! Tom, I'm afraid there's something terrible hanging over our heads. I can just seem to feel it!"

"But no matter what it is," Tom hurriedly said, "you're going to be the same brave little pal I've always had stand by me, and I know it. Do you suppose, now, there could have been any sort of epidemic break out up here; something that might scare all these people, and break up the hotel man's business?"

"I don't know, Tom; it seemed to me even *worse* than that. But didn't you say you had something

queer to tell me? Perhaps it has something to do with the same thing that gave the landlord such a shock. Tell me about it now!"

Lucille had a way of ordering her brother about at times that was almost domineering; but then Tom rather liked being taken in hand after that fashion. Besides, he was suddenly reminded that others, as well as the landlord and those Paris commercial drummers, not to speak of the zouave home on a furlough, were acting in a very strange way.

"Oh! what I was going to say was about our chauffeur," he began.

"Andre Duval, you mean?" asked Lucille, bending closer to him.

"Yes. I happened to see him talking with two men whose looks didn't impress me very much, I must say," the boy explained. "Of course it was just getting dusk, and I couldn't see extra well; but I thought they looked sneaky and if you asked me I'd say I wouldn't like to run up against that pair of a dark night, and in a lonely place!"

"Oh!"

That was all Lucille said just then. Apparently Tom had succeeded in giving her new cause for apprehension. His manner, even more than what he had thus far said, aroused her fears anew. Tom went on with his story, sinking his voice low, though there seemed no chance of any eavesdropper overhearing what he was saying.

"I watched them talking, Lucille, and it seemed to me the two men were trying to argue Andre into something that he didn't wholly approve of. They pointed over at the inn, and I supposed at the time it was uncle on the porch they meant, though you say he had gone inside. And then, what do you suppose they did but walk over to our car and examine it, just as if it was for sale!"

"But, Tom," the girl protested, rather feebly it must be admitted, "all that might have only been what any chauffeur would have done. Perhaps Andre is proud of having such a fine touring car in his charge, and was explaining some of its points to his friends."

"Well, that might be so, of course, sis," Tom replied, grudgingly; "I don't want to be too hard on Andre. It's only suspicion so far with me; but I tell you their actions more than anything else made me think all sorts of terrible things. Why, I even figured out what a snap it would be if some rascally fellows up here in these quarries we hear so much about, made a business of carrying off rich tourists, and holding them for ransom. Uncle Alvin would be a pretty good subject for that sort of game."

Lucille laughed at that, though to tell the truth the effort was rather forced, since she did not feel very merry.

"You're a foolish boy, Tom," she told him; "and I don't like the way you go around thinking bad

things of Andre Duval. I'm sure he's as honest as can be, and wouldn't dream of doing anything to injure us. I suppose you think they might steal the car sometime in the night?"

It was Tom's turn to chuckle then.

"I did think so," he told Lucille, "but that doesn't bother me any more, because you see I've fixed it so nobody can run the car until I get good and ready to fish out a small but most important part of the engine that I've hid."

Lucille took a dozen seconds to fully grasp the scope of her brother's diplomacy. Then she seemed willing to agree with him that at least it was not a bad idea.

"I suppose no harm can come of your doing that, Tom," she replied; "but it'll be too bad if he learns about it. I shall blush every time he looks at me, to remember that my brother suspected him of being a thief — perhaps worse."

"Oh! after all he may never learn about it, for I mean to slip out at daybreak and fix things up again. There'll be no harm done. People take out fire insurance not because they expect to have their house burned, but to feel easy in their minds. I shall sleep better knowing our car is safe."

"But do you think, Tom, there could be any connection between what you saw, and what is going on in there?"

"Whew! I hadn't thought of that!" muttered the boy, as he bent forward again, in order to look once more through the nearby window. "I wonder if it could be so? Seems like everything must be happening at once; and here we've hardly got started on our trip."

"They are still talking it over, Tom; and the landlord doesn't look a bit happier," Lucille was saying in his ear. "Poor man! if he had lost his last sou, or heard his dearest friend was dead, he couldn't seem more miserable."

"They don't seem to be trying to comfort him, that I can notice," said Tom, shrewdly, "and that makes me think the bad news wasn't for the keeper of the inn alone. It has struck everybody the same; only the soldier seems to be grinning as though it acted differently on him."

"So he is," added Lucille; "I wonder why that should be so? What business has a soldier to laugh when other people look sad?"

Tom might have tried to analyze this puzzling question, only at that moment he made another discovery calculated to rivet his attention.

"Look, Lucille, now we'll likely know what it all means!" he exclaimed.

"Uncle Alvin has entered the taproom," she whispered, in new excitement; "and the landlord is calling him over to where the group of excited guests

are standing. Yes, I do believe he means to tell uncle what has happened; and of course he must let us know soon."

The two stood just outside the window, and watched with an eagerness that caused their hearts to beat much faster than their wont. They saw the elderly gentleman approach the group, an expression of mild surprise on his face. Then the landlord must have said something to him in French, which Uncle Alvin spoke like a native.

"Oh! it has staggered uncle, you see!" gasped Lucille, her hand tightening on Tom's coat-sleeve. "He looks as if he had received almost as bad a shock as the innkeeper did. But just like Uncle Alvin, he refuses to believe bad news can be as serious as others think it. There, he is asking questions now, and the man who came in a little while ago seems to be answering him."

The seconds appeared like hours as they remained there, watching what was transpiring so close by. They could not hear more than an occasional word, owing to the puffing noise made by a motor pulling a train of loaded freight vans on the railway line that ran through the town.

"Oh! dear, I wish he would hurry, and come to look for us," said Lucille, impatiently.

"Uncle is being convinced, whatever it is they are telling him," Tom continued, his curiosity not one whit abated.

“Yes, I am afraid it’s so, Tom, for he looks more serious than I ever saw him before, as long back as I can remember. Oh! it must be something serious to make Uncle Alvin turn so grave. What can be hanging over our heads? Isn’t he turning away yet, Tom?”

“I think he must pretty soon,” the boy replied, “because he doesn’t ask so many questions, and I’m sure he is thinking deeply, for I can see his face screwed up, like you know it always is when he’s making plans.”

“Perhaps you might give that little whistle of yours, Tom,” suggested the girl, in desperation, for she was becoming very nervous under the strain of the suspense. “Uncle would recognize it, and turn this way. Then we could beckon to him, you know.”

“Wait, he’s turned away now, and it seems as though he meant to come out here looking for us!” Tom told her. “There, he went back again to ask a last question, but it’s all right, and we’ll soon know the worst.”

“We must be brave, and not show him that we’re bothered, no matter what it may be, Tom,” the girl was thoughtful enough to say. “You know uncle is not as strong as he might be, and subject to his bad spells, too. We’ve got to act as though nothing mattered much, and it would all come out right in the end.”

"You mean we'll take a leaf from his ordinary way of acting, and lift the load off his mind? All right, you can count on me to do my level best."

"There, he's turning away again, Tom; let's move back to the table, and act just as if we hadn't been peeping."

They had hardly reached the spot indicated when Uncle Alvin came hurriedly out of the door of the taproom. He glanced about as though not sure of their presence.

"Here we are, Uncle!" called Lucille, trying to keep her voice from betraying her excited condition.

At that the little old gentleman hastened toward them. The semi-darkness concealed his face so that they could not tell whether it showed unusually pale or not.

"I've got some bad news to give you, children," he said, as he reached the others. "We must all leave here, perhaps this very night. They tell me Germany has declared war on Russia; and you know that will mean on France also. Even now the German army may be pouring over the French border not thirty miles away."

CHAPTER VIII

STRANDED IN THE SHADOW OF WAR

"THEN that means war all along the northern border of France?" exclaimed Tom, who was fairly well posted on the facts, since he had heard considerable talk concerning the shadow on the peace of Europe.

"Yes, because the very first move of the Kaiser will be to rush a strong army down to take Paris," Uncle Alvin told them. "The news came just a little while ago. This man says it is spreading all over the town. If you listen you can hear loud shouts even now. I have no doubt every one is rushing here and there, telling what new things they have learned, with the men getting ready to leave immediately for the places where their regiments mobilize."

Tom and Lucille were thrilled by what they had heard. They were of course much too young to understand what horrors would follow in the track of a war between such powerful nations as Germany, France, Austria, Russia and possibly Great Britain; but something of what it might mean to the peace-loving people in that country of Northern France filled them with pity.

Their own situation, however, must receive prompt attention. Tom proved that he could be depended on as an able assistant to Uncle Alvin in an emergency such as that which now faced them.

"Then we must get back to Paris as quickly as possible; that's the only thing we can do, Uncle, isn't it?" he asked.

"I'm glad to see that you take it so coolly, my boy," remarked the other, sensibly relieved of a part of his burden. "Yes, that is our wisest move. Already they say the Government, anticipating this sudden emergency, has taken possession of all the railways in the republic."

"Then it's lucky we don't have to depend on the train to take us back to Paris," Lucille remarked, thinking she must say something if only to show their Uncle Alvin that she did not mean to allow herself to be frightened, as many girls must surely have been under similar conditions.

"Yes, but even there we may be caught napping, and lose our car," she was told.

"Why, how could that be, Uncle?" questioned the girl.

"The Government will commandeer every motor truck and automobile it can lay hands on," he informed her. "You know this is the day of gasoline, or petrol as they call it over here; and they say the German army has tens of thousands of motor

trucks intended to be used so as to carry their army ahead many times as fast as men could walk."

Tom started, and wondered whether after all that mysterious talk between Andre and the two strange men could have had any connection with the taking over of the car for the service of the army.

Had those men wanted the chauffeur to run away with the automobile, acting under the authority of an order which may have already been posted at some public place in town?

Things began to clear up, and Tom was seeing that after all Andre might have been protesting against treating his employer so scurvily so early in the game.

"Do you think we ought to start to-night, Uncle?" asked Lucille, who evidently did not fancy such a move, though not for worlds would she try to put any obstacles in the way.

"It might be best, if you think you can stand the ride," the old gentleman returned.

"Shucks! you know it would be just pie for me, Uncle!" observed Tom, disdainfully.

"And there will be a pretty good-sized moon, too," added Lucille, "so don't bother one minute worrying about me, Uncle. I rather like the idea of racing along over hills and through valleys at night, knowing as we do that perhaps before a great while these same hills will see a battle between German and French armies."

When Lucille said this she certainly did not dream how for long weeks, and even months, that same region would be harassed by the roar and destruction of a conflict such as has never had its equal since the birth of the world; and how even that peaceful little town, with its churches and picturesque buildings, would be laid waste by a storm of bursting shells.

"Oh! thunder!" exclaimed Tom; and there was such a note of sudden dismay in his voice that Lucille, accustomed to his ways, immediately cried out:

"Now you've just thought of something unpleasant, I know, Tom; what is it?"

"Maybe we can't get away after all, the more the pity!" he replied dejectedly.

"But why?" she asked him, bent on knowing the reason for his abrupt remark.

Tom glanced uneasily toward Uncle Alvin.

"Go on and tell us," said the little old gentleman, steadily; "we're all in the same boat, and must share things in common. What do you know that would stall us up here in the danger zone, Tom?"

"Why, hang the luck, you see, Uncle, our supply of gas is pretty nearly gone," Tom informed them, with a grimace, and a shrug that he had of course picked up since landing in France, where it stands for so much.

"The petrol, you mean," added Lucille; "why, I do remember Andre saying he'd have to look

around for a fresh stock, if the keeper of the inn didn't have any to sell. Oh! Tom, perhaps that was why he went away with those two men?"

"I'm uneasy about our being able to get any," Uncle Alvin told them. "You see, they have stringent laws here, and as I understand it, the very minute the order for real mobilization is sent out all over the land certain things become Government property from that time."

"You mean that even if we found any one having a supply of gasoline they might refuse to sell us five or ten gallons even, because they knew it belonged to the Government; is that it, Uncle?" asked Lucille, always very clear-headed in connection with such things.

"Yes," continued the gentleman, "and the first thing we ought to do, Tom, is to try and see where we can secure any sort of a supply. Even ten gallons would carry us a good many miles to the south."

"And every mile would mean we'd be nearer safety, wouldn't it?" Lucille observed.

"Then let's get busy, all of us," said Tom, with his accustomed energy. "Lucille, will you look after our luggage, so it can be carried out to the car again? Even if Andre fails to show up, trust me for running the machine all right. I'm enough of a chauffeur for that, I hope."

"First of all, to ask the innkeeper if he can let

us have a small amount in our supply tank," suggested Mr. Maillard, moving once more toward the door of the taproom.

Tom followed at his heels, while the girl flitted away to the rooms they had expected to occupy during the night, to gather up their few belongings, and carry them to the porch, whence they could be easily loaded in the car, in case they were fortunate enough to be able to proceed.

Tom stood and looked on as Uncle Alvin interrogated the landlord. The poor man realized that there was every possibility of his livelihood being destroyed by a German invasion, with all the horrors that this might imply. But the worst had apparently passed, and he was looking both resigned and resolute. Perhaps he too had a niche to fill in some army corps, and might later on be found on the firing line, striving to save his native land from the sword of the invader.

But Tom knew before his uncle told him that their quest for a supply of petrol was vain so far as obtaining it at the inn was concerned. The landlord shook his head several times in the negative. Evidently he sympathized with the American tourists, but was helpless to aid them.

"We will have to see what we can do in the town," the old gentleman said, as he rejoined Tom. "They have none here, and gave me little hope that we could obtain even a gallon, for by now the

news must have spread all over town, and the rules are very severe."

They had hardly set forth when it became evident to Tom that the startling news must have been carried from one end of the town to the other, so that every one knew war was a certainty.

The boy had witnessed many lively scenes in his native land, on various occasions, some serious, others joyous; but he told himself that never before had he looked on such a picture of excitement as was breaking out all around him in that threatened town of Northern France.

Men were running this way and that. Occasionally they would stop to exchange a few sentences with some one whom they met, only to speed on faster than ever. Women, too, could be seen in groups, chattering volubly, with white faces. Children were crying, frightened by the unusual clamor, dogs barked, and if a volcano close by had threatened an eruption it could not have created more of a panic.

Already a number of men had hastily donned military uniforms and were upon the streets, stalking proudly about as though deep down in their martial hearts they welcomed the coming of this hour when they could show themselves as heroes.

The further Tom and Uncle Alvin went the more the clamor seemed to grow. It was as though Bedlam had broken loose. And to think that this

same excitement must have gripped scores of towns and cities all over the frontier country, where the brunt of a German invasion must of necessity be first felt!

No wonder a high-spirited boy like Tom Mailard felt his heart beat in sympathy with the cause that was so dear to these people. Just then, had he been given a chance, he would willingly have enlisted in the ranks of these people who were akin to his own ancestors.

From the landlord of the inn Uncle Alvin had heard of a place where petrol was kept, to be sold to passing tourists. As this was a public stand, doubtless the proprietor would be one of the first to be ordered not to dispose of another drop of his precious fuel, so absolutely necessary for the moving of the army that was to defend the frontier.

Upon reaching his place they found that a sign was hanging from the small building over which the one word "Petrol" stood.

"What does it say, Uncle?" asked Tom anxiously, although he could easily give a good guess without being told.

"We've come too late, I'm afraid," replied the other, "for he has announced that owing to mobilization having started he is unable to sell more petrol to any one, since every drop belongs to France, and the army."

“That knocks out our plans, doesn’t it, Uncle?” complained Tom.

“The only chance we have,” continued Uncle Alvin, who did not give up easily, it appeared, “is, as the landlord told me we might have to do — find some private individual who will spare us ten gallons from his own stock. I’m going now to look up a Monsieur Capon who lives in a house around the corner. He is said to be a good-natured gentleman, and perhaps he would spare enough to take us on our way.”

Everywhere they could see men discussing the latest reports that seemed to be coming in from the north, many of them canards of course, but calculated to add immeasurably to the excitement.

“I can’t believe it is possible,” said Uncle Alvin, as they hurried along; “but one man back there was telling the crowd he had it on the best authority that the Kaiser’s terrible army has already crossed over on to French soil!”

CHAPTER IX

ANDRE HEARS THE CALL TO DUTY

"Is this the house you meant, Uncle?" asked Tom, as the older gentleman stopped before a building.

"Yes, it is here M. Capon lives," replied the other, as he headed for the door.

"How does he happen to have some petrol to spare?" continued the boy.

"I was told by the innkeeper that he used to have a small car, which was smashed a few weeks back in an accident among the hills. The owner barely escaped with his life, and has vowed never to own such a vehicle again. It was thought by our host that he might have some petrol left over, which he would gladly give away, or dispose of."

He pulled the bell, and presently some one came around the side of the house. On Uncle Alvin making known his great need in his best French, Tom was keenly disappointed to see from the manner of the other that something was amiss.

"Come, there is no use staying any longer, Tom," remarked the older tourist, after apparently thanking the owner of the house. "M. Capon, too, is in something of a hurry to get into his uniform.

He belongs to some local company, and every son of France is wild to don his red trousers and shoulder his gun, now that the long-expected war is at hand."

"But didn't he have any gasoline left over, Uncle?" asked Tom, disappointed more than he would have liked to confess.

"He did until just a few minutes ago," replied Uncle Alvin. "We wasted time in going to the public square, and some one got ahead of us."

"Oh! that was too mean for anything!"

"Just about ten gallons in all, he told me, which would have fixed us up handsomely, I think," continued the old gentleman. "He let this party have can and all."

"And why are you hurrying so now, Uncle?"

"I want to try and overtake that man, to see if I can coax him to let me have that petrol for any amount of money. I stand willing to make it a record price for ten gallons of the stuff and will almost let him fix his own valuation on it, because we must have it."

Uncle Alvin so seldom showed signs of being deeply concerned that Tom was greatly impressed.

"I think," said Tom, "I glimpse him up ahead there; yes, he's staggering along with a big can, which he could never carry if it were filled."

"You're right, Tom; I can see him. Yes, that's surely our man. Put your best foot forward, and

we'll soon overtake him. Then let me do the bargaining, Tom."

"I hope he acts sensibly, then, that's all I can say," muttered the boy, at the same time clinching his hands in a belligerent way, as though far from convinced that force ought not to be brought into play, if dickering failed to achieve the desired result.

All at once Tom uttered a loud cry.

"Why, Uncle, would you believe it, that's our Andre!" he exclaimed.

"Do you really mean it, Tom?" the other demanded, with a note of delight in his voice; "then he's a jewel, indeed. He went after a supply of petrol when he first learned that war had broken out, for Andre knew how difficult it would be for us to obtain any by ourselves."

Things began to brighten up for Tom. The clouds that had seemed so gloomy before now parted, to allow the light to shine through the rift.

"Hello! there, Andre!" he called out.

Immediately the bearer of the huge petrol can came to a halt, and discovering who had hailed him, awaited their coming.

Tom fretted because he could not enter into the spirit of the brief though earnest talk that started between Uncle Alvin and the chauffeur. They were all the while moving steadily along, because Andre had immediately resumed his forward progress while explaining his intentions.

Every once in so often Uncle Alvin would turn to Tom, and give him some idea concerning what the other was saying.

“Andre tells me as soon as he received word that the mobilization had been ordered he knew he would have to go north to a certain fortress, where his company has its station marked out, and where he can help man the big guns. But it pained him to think that he must desert an employer who had been so kind and indulgent to him; and especially when the petrol tank was empty, so that we would be left helpless here where danger lurked. Andre, you see, Tom, is a man of honor.”

“And I’m sorry now,” said Tom, with hasty repentance, “that I ever thought he could plot against us. But please go on and tell me more, Uncle.”

“So when his friends urged him to throw up his position in order to obey his country’s call, Andre refused to go until he had at least made an effort to replenish our supply of fuel for the engine. When he has placed this ten gallons in the tank he says he must bid us adieu, much as he regrets the necessity.”

“Bully for Andre! He’s all right! I’ll always think of him as a loyal fellow. I take off my hat to him. But here we are near the inn, and there’s sis waiting on the porch, as anxious as can be.”

He waved his hat to Lucille, who could just make them out in the moonlight. She hurried down, and was in time to see Andre pouring the precious supply of gasoline into the tank. It was a small enough portion at that, but would take them a considerable distance, when they must rely once more on good fortune to replenish their tank.

The first thing Lucille did was to give her brother a little jab with her elbow. Apparently a guilty conscience told Tom what she meant by this, if one could judge from what he said, knowing that Andre would not be able to understand the tenor of his language.

"Yes, that's right, I was silly to doubt him, sis," was what Tom admitted, for if capable of forming a suspicion on occasion, the boy would just as quickly take himself to task for making a mistake. "He's all wool, and a yard wide; but for all that we're going to lose him."

"In what way?" asked the startled girl.

"Same old story — Andre belongs to the rank and file of the Grand Army of France and must obey the mobilization summons right away. He can't even start back with us, because his way is toward Mauberge, or Verdun, or some other fortified place near the border to the north. And so, after all, you'll have to trust your precious selves to a greenhorn chauffeur."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Lucille, quickly

adding: "Of course I don't mean I'm at all afraid about your not being able to drive the car as well as any one, Tom, because I've seen what you can do. But then he knows all the little turns and bad places among these rough hills."

"Huh! we ought to consider ourselves mighty lucky as it is," Tom told her, after which he proceeded to explain all about what was happening in the town, with the men crazy to get away to the front, the women bravely urging them on, and every living soul filled with patriotic ardor that could hardly be excelled.

"It's just wonderful, sis," he concluded, "to see the way these poor people try to put on a brave face, while their hearts must be breaking. But there, Andre has finished putting our little stock of petrol in the tank. Now uncle is pressing his hand warmly; and you can depend on it there's a nice roll of notes of the Bank of France going with that hearty handshake."

To Lucille, Andre could express himself. He took her extended hand, and bowed over it with all the grace of a dancing master Tom remembered at home.

"It breaks the heart to say adieu, young ma'mselle," he told her, earnestly; "but we of the army must obey the call to duty. Even now they tell us the enemy is on the border. Soon here in this peaceful country war must reign. Some—

many, will never see another summer; but there must be soldiers when there is war. And we all must die some time. So adieu! It is not permitted every one to do as he would wish. I therefore must fight, when I should be much happier driving your car."

After also shaking hands with Tom the chauffeur-artilleryman bowed again, and walked hastily away. Soon they saw him breaking into a run, so anxious was he to reach the station on the railway before a train that was waiting to receive the first detachment of troops pulled out for the north.

Lucille sighed. This was the first time she had ever been so close to where the tide of human passions ran like a millrace. In her own fair land war had been unknown for years, so that she knew nothing about what terrible things it brings in its train. But before Tom and his sister were allowed by a baffling fate to shake the dust of this disputed region from their shoes, they would be brought to realize many things that up to then they were only acquainted with through history.

"What now, Uncle?" asked Tom, alive to the fact that time counted for something when momentous events were happening so rapidly all around them.

"If we leave here to-night, we might just as well start now as later," the old gentleman replied, tightening his lips, as though making up his mind they

were in for a rough time, and must summon all their fortitude to meet the conditions bravely.

"Now I'm glad that I made all those notes as we came along," Tom told them. "You laughed at me, sis, and wanted to know what use they would ever be to me. I told you I didn't know, because we had no idea of returning that way again, but ever since I became a Boy Scout I have had it impressed on my mind to observe things as I went along. It strengthens the memory, and you never know when you may need the knowledge you pick up."

"I don't suppose we had better take the chance of staying over here until morning, Uncle?" queried Lucille.

"That was what I asked Andre," she was told.

"And what did he say, Uncle?"

"Of course it would be much safer for us to negotiate the hilly country in the daytime, because there are some bad places, you remember," Uncle Alvin replied; "but when Andre told me we would run a great risk of having the car seized, and commandeered for army purposes if we stayed here until morning, I figured that we'd be showing poor judgment in delaying."

"That means we'll make the start, does it?" asked Tom, ready to hurry over to where he had secreted the essential part of the engine, at the time he feared Andre might have been unfaithful.

"All right, let's call it settled, and make up our minds." Uncle Alvin set his teeth hard together when saying this, because for good or evil he knew their path would be mapped out, and there could be no holding back.

It did not take Tom long to adjust the engine so that it responded to his demand when he used the self-starter. Uncle Alvin had gone to the inn, saying he would return as soon as he had settled his bill.

"I'll get everything aboard in the meantime," Tom called out, "so we can start off the minute you get back. We don't want to give these people any chance to hold up our car, if we can help it. Get aboard, sis, and arrange things as I hand them to you. And here's hoping all goes well, so that we'll turn up safe and sound in Paris before a great many hours!"

CHAPTER X

AN ACCIDENT ON THE ROAD

It did not take long for these matters to be carried out. Lucille fairly flew to snatch up a bundle of rugs before taking her place in the car. She was full of enthusiasm, and ready to do her part in the flitting.

As for Tom, this chance to pilot the expedition along the roads of Northern France by night was "just pie" to him, as he called it in his boyish fashion. He loved to handle the wheel of a powerful car, and had gained the reputation of being a bold as well as a careful driver.

Uncle Alvin soon settled their account with the innkeeper. He reported that the latter was "overwhelmed with grief" because his guests were all fleeing from the shelter of his hospitable roof.

"Not that the good man blames any of us," Uncle Alvin added, hastily, for he would not knowingly do any one a wrong, "because he understands how unfortunate it would be for even noncombatants like Americans to be caught between the lines of hostile armies. And as for those commercial travelers, there is not one of them but is fairly wild to reach the town where his regiment will mobilize."

"I guess we're all ready now, Uncle!" sang out Tom, trying to appear as gay as though they were bound on a little jaunt, perhaps out to some country place where the young people were giving a moonlight barn dance, instead of fleeing from the terrors of a world war.

Tom had the front seat to himself now, though Lucille hinted that she would be only too glad to share it with him, but did not think it kind to leave Uncle Alvin alone in the capacious body of the big touring car.

Their robes and such luggage as they carried had been neatly stowed away, for Lucille knew just how to go about anything like that. Her deft hands had a knack of disposing of things in a way that Tom thought wonderful, for in his clumsy boyish fashion no doubt he would have simply tossed everything in, and be glad to "wash his hands of the business."

"Good-by, old inn!" said Lucille, as she turned and waved her hand, after Tom had started the car along. "We expected a different ending to our visit here, and a good night's sleep, but nobody's complaining that I can hear. We're going to take things as they come, eh, Uncle?"

"I suppose we'll have to, dear," replied the old gentleman, "and I want to tell you right now that it's a great comfort to me to see how cheerfully you accept the bad with the good. I always did say

you had the stuff for a heroine in you, Lucille, and Tom will bear me out in that."

"Listen to all the strange sounds in the town; isn't it remarkable how different things seem from when we arrived, when it was all so peaceful?" In this way did Lucille manage to turn the conversation to another subject than herself.

"Everybody is fairly crazy," said Mr. Maillard, soberly. "They have often talked of this day as the years passed, and now that it's actually burst on them do you wonder that they're excited? They do not realize, poor things, all it must mean for them soon — the desolated homes, the vacant chairs, the broken hearts! Now it is all excitement, and glory, and revenge upon the Prussians who took away their fair provinces of Alsace and Lorraine."

They were making their way slowly through the town while talking in this manner. Tom was very careful in handling his car. He even drew up hastily to avoid running over a little yellow dog that had incautiously frisked in the way; indeed, if it had been a child he could hardly have shown more tenderness of heart, for Tom loved dogs even more than most boys do.

The car was a good one, as most of those made in France are. It moved along with very little noise, so that it kept Tom busy from time to time sounding his warning horn.

Presently they would be on the outskirts of the town, beyond the view of the cathedral towers. Then he expected to pick up more speed, since the road would be freer from obstructions.

"What do you suppose all that whistling can be; it sounds as though baby engines were making signals?" Lucille presently asked.

"Those are the motors on the railway," Uncle Alvin informed her. "You must know that over here they will not tolerate the ear-splitting whistles that you can hear on most railroads in the States. From the continual rumbling, as well as the wild shouting in that section, I should say that troop trains are already passing through, headed for the northern fortresses."

"Whew! then they must have had the soldiers quartered in the cars, and waiting for the word to come," hazarded Tom, "because mighty little time has passed since the news was sent along the line that Germany had declared war on Russia."

"This is only a beginning," Uncle Alvin informed them. "It will take hundreds and hundreds of trains to fetch an army, with all its munitions of war, to the threatened border. And if we could see what is going on over in Germany, with her network of military railways, we would be appalled at its magnitude, I imagine."

Now they were beyond the town limits, and their pace increased. The road was in fine condition,

though Tom knew that before long they were apt to come upon sections where the same could hardly be said. This was on account of the fact that the country became hilly, and abrupt ascents and descents had to be covered, with many sharp turns, where a miscalculation might spell trouble for unwary travelers.

Most of the noise died out as they left the town behind them. There seemed to be no end, however, to the rumble of moving trains, now near, and again more distant. The railways were busy transporting thousands of French soldiers in their baggy red trousers, and with knapsacks and arms, toward the north. (See Note 2.)

Just as Uncle Alvin had told them, from that hour travel south was virtually suspended, and no amount of money could have induced the authorities to start a train in that direction, which would conflict with the influx of troops.

"I'm afraid that moon is going to disappoint us after all," Lucille remarked, after they had covered a number of miles, and everything seemed to be working as smoothly as clockwork.

"The moon's all right, sis," Tom told her, laughingly; "put the blame where it belongs. That bank of clouds was hovering low on the horizon at sunset, and made a mighty fine picture; but now they've taken a notion to climb up, and soon we'll lose our lantern up there in the sky."

"It's a good thing we have the lamps going," Uncle Alvin observed.

"Even they don't work to please me," complained Tom. "If I'd known about it before I could have fixed them in a little while, I reckon. You see, we haven't had any occasion to use lamps up to now."

"That's because we've done no night riding," Lucille added. "We laid out a schedule that was easy to follow, and arrived at the places where we meant to spend the night before evening came on. But they'll give you enough light to see the road by, won't they, Tom?"

"Sure they will," the other replied, with his customary cheeriness, "and if all other people who are using the road will be as careful as I expect to be, there's no reason to expect that we'll have any trouble."

"We seem to be coming to the hilly country again, Tom," remarked Lucille, five minutes afterwards.

"Yes, I know it, sis, and I remember only too well that around here we're going to meet up with some bad turns, after we get to climbing. I only hope we don't have the hard luck to run across a car coming swinging down-grade on us when we're negotiating one of the sharp curves."

"Oh! I remember one that Andre said had been the scene of a terrible accident only last spring!"

exclaimed the girl, uneasily. "A party of Americans lost control of their car, and in making that turn while flying down the grade it tipped over, then it smashed through the heavy guard fence, and they were all killed. It made me shudder just to look down at that precipice; and I'll breathe much easier after we get safely past it."

"I had to smile," Uncle Alvin ventured to say, "when Andre casually mentioned that the chauffeur of that runaway car was an American whom the party had brought over from our side. If you read between the lines he meant us to observe that a French driver would never have allowed his car to get away from him on any grade."

They were now ascending the hill, and the engine seemed to be standing by its reputation, for Tom had no trouble.

"There's no use talking," he exclaimed, with the enthusiasm a driver always feels when his machine shows itself capable, and up to expectation, "these French mechanics know how to build a car that will meet every requirement. Listen to that engine purr as sweetly as you please. It does the work every time, and makes so little fuss over it you'd think it was next to nothing."

"And yet this is a fairly steep hill, if I am any judge," Uncle Alvin observed. Lucille had become strangely quiet. Tom knew what was in her thoughts, for they were approaching the dangerous

section of the climb, when several bad turns in the road must be surmounted.

It was by now fairly dark around them, thanks to the heavy clouds that had moved across the face of the moon, high up in the heavens. Tom paid strict attention to his business. This was no time for thinking of anything else. He hugged the inner side of the road, because that was his proper place; and should they have the hard luck to meet a descending vehicle or car, it must keep to the right, otherwise the outside.

Lucille was straining her hearing. She hoped to be thus able to detect in advance whether any car might be descending the hills, so as to tell Tom in time for him to sound his horn in warning.

The lamps were certainly all that Tom called them, for they gave a wretched illumination. Tom had good eyesight, however, and could see the road ahead plainly, though to Uncle Alvin it was far from clear.

Perhaps the words spoken by Lucille had worked on the nerves of the old gentleman, for he clutched the side of the seat nearest him, and acted as though he too would be very thankful when they had succeeded in surmounting the difficulties now about to beset their way.

Once or twice the girl felt a thrill as she fancied she heard some suspicious sound in advance, such

as might be caused by a coasting car coming at a swift pace down the changing grade.

Their own engine made so much noise at this stage, being hard pushed, that it was next to impossible to determine whether her ears had deceived her or not. Of course there was nothing to be done, since Tom dared not bring his charge to a halt in that exposed place.

Lucille sighed with temporary relief when they reached a little plateau where the grade became more moderate. Of course it was only for a brief period, when they must expect to start upon the second climb, no less strenuous than that which had just been accomplished.

Had Tom only thought to stop for a minute while upon this more level stretch it might have made a vast difference in their fortunes; but he felt that the quicker they attacked that next hill the sooner their troubles would be over. So it was straight on with Tom, his speed increasing so as to get a good start for the arduous climb, as is natural to all pilots.

Lucille looked back. They were now at such a height that in the day-time, as she remembered, a magnificent view would be spread out, with the town they had left in the rear looking like a gem in the midst of the green foliage, its cathedral spire standing up prominently—as afterwards happened,

making a range-finder for the German gunners on many an occasion.

Now all she could see were scattered lights, that may have sprung from cottages, or be ranged along the line of railway.

They could constantly hear the rumble of those endless trains moving in the one direction, and bearing the crowds of cheering troops.

Lucille, being young, felt only the excitement of all this. Uncle Alvin, as an old and experienced traveler, could look further, and realize how it must be but the froth on the surface of the stream; underneath would lie the cruel rocks, the pitiless maelstrom which would suck in thousands upon thousands of lives before the end came.

The next ascent was now before them. Tom was prepared to start up boldly, under the belief that it would soon be over, when they could congratulate themselves in having reached the apex of the ridge. After that would come a descent more gradual, then level roads for a long distance.

"There's a turn first, Tom, you remember," warned Lucille.

"Yes, I know," the pilot answered, without taking his eyes off the road for a second, dimly seen as it was. "I bet you I fix those lamps so they'll dazzle any one. It's too bad to have things so badly prepared that when you want them most —"

Just then Lucille gripped his arm convulsively.



And then came a shock that upset them all into the roadway.

"Tom, oh! Tom, the horn! There's a car coming down the grade, and without lights, too. Hurry, oh! hurry, Tom!"

He did everything that was possible to avoid a collision. Like a flash his hand swerved the car to the extreme right of the road, which unfortunately was exceedingly narrow just there. And the other one sounded the automobile horn with furious blasts that pierced the night air.

They could hear startled voices of men ahead of them. Lucille fairly held her breath with alarm, though she sat perfectly rigid, which in fact was the wisest thing the girl could have done. There was only one side toward which she might have jumped, and that would take her directly in the path of the oncoming car.

They heard the rush of the other motor. No doubt the driver was doing all in his power to bring it to a halt. This was a fortunate thing as it turned out, for had it struck Tom's car when going at a furious pace the result must have been serious indeed.

As it was they saw a black object suddenly loom up in front, heard a number of excited Frenchmen shouting, and then came a shock that upset them all into the roadway.

CHAPTER XI

HELD UP

“Tom, oh! Tom, where are you?”

In her great distress of mind Lucille's first thought concerned the brother she loved so well, rather than herself. To her joy she immediately caught Tom's cheery voice answering her, from some place nearby.

“I'm all right, I guess, sis; and I hope you're not hurt?”

“No, no, nothing to speak of. But where is uncle?”

The car had been partly overturned by the force of the collision. Some of the men who occupied the other automobile had been spilled out upon the road also, and may have received minor injuries. Their first thought, for they were Frenchmen, was in connection with those whom their recklessness had imperiled.

It was not actually dark, so that Tom, as he scrambled to his knees and felt to ascertain if he had received anything more than a few scratches and bruises, could make out that all of the men, at least seven in number, were garbed in the uniforms of officers of the French Army.

From this he knew that they had been dashing furiously forward in the hope of making connection with a certain train in the town that lay miles away.

They immediately started to apologize, at least Tom imagined this was the burden of what they were saying, as they assisted him to rise, others having hastened to help Lucille.

"Ask them to look after Uncle Alvin, sis!" Tom called out, for the fact that he had not heard a single word from the old gentleman thus far began to fill him with dread.

"We have found him, Tom," the girl almost immediately said, "and he seems to be badly hurt!"

Some of the officers had already righted the partly upset car. Their own had apparently escaped without any serious damage, for the engine was still purring, while Tom's was silent, for he had shut off the power instinctively, just before they were run down.

With a match in his trembling hand Tom succeeded in lighting one of the lamps; the other having been put out of commission entirely. When an accident occurs it is of prime importance that some idea of its extent be learned without delay, and therefore Tom was doing the wisest thing he could have hit upon.

When the light shone it revealed the fact that Uncle Alvin was coming to his senses. The French

officers were as attentive as they could well be, under the circumstances. They tried to express their regret to Lucille, who spoke their language, that their extreme haste had had such a disastrous consequence.

"He has a broken arm," Lucille announced in a low tone, not wishing to have the victim of the collision overhear what she said; "but the worst of it, as we know, is the shock to his whole system."

"How far do they say it is to the next town?" asked Tom. "I ought to know, but seems as if this thing had knocked me silly, so that I can't remember things."

"Listen, Tom," the girl told him, quietly, for she realized that he had received a pretty rough shaking up when thrown so far upon the hard road; "the town is not more than five miles off, and in the valley, and best of all, the captain tells me there is a good hospital, where uncle can be well taken care of."

"Whew! that is lucky for us," muttered Tom, "because I'd hate to think of having him suffer any more than is necessary. We may have to spend a long time there, if he isn't fit to travel; or the military authorities swipe our car, as Andre was afraid would happen."

The French officers carried Uncle Alvin to the nest Lucille hastily made for him with the robes. He had recovered his senses by now, and bravely

repressed any sign of suffering. Indeed, Uncle Alvin was apparently the most unconcerned of them all, and chatted with the officers just as though he did not have to shut his teeth very hard from time to time to keep from groaning.

"I think we ought to be thankful it was no worse, my dears," he told Tom and his sister. "If it was one of you, now, how grieved I should have been! Nothing much matters when you're my age. My life is in the past, while yours is mostly in the future, which makes all the difference in the world."

There being nothing more they could do to show their regret, and time being of the utmost value, as their patriotism urged them forward, the half-dozen and more valiant warriors bade them adieu, and sped away.

This left the Maillard party to continue on up the hill, and then make for the nearest town, where the hospital was situated.

Lucille expressed herself as pleased when the dangerous curve was passed in safety. She had held her breath while they turned it.

"I only wonder how that other car coming down ever managed to get around without an accident?" she remarked, when the danger zone had been placed behind them.

"Oh! most likely the man at the wheel was raised in this part of the country, and knows every foot of the road," Tom told her. "But I call it

next door to a crime for any one to travel over country roads like these at night, with not a lamp to show strangers they are coming."

"They explained that to me," Lucille hastened to say. "You see, this was not their first accident to-night. An hour ago they struck a limb that had broken from a tree, and it smashed both their lamps."

"Oh! if that's a fact of course there was some excuse," Tom continued, slightly mollified; "but they might have sounded their horn once in a while when coming down that steep grade. It would have warned us to reply, and all this trouble might have been avoided."

"Yes," said Uncle Alvin, not to be deterred from joining in the conversation by such a little thing as a fractured arm, "there's an old saying, you remember, to the effect that all of us would find it easy to get on if only our foresight was as good as our hindsight. We can see how things might have been different, *after* they've happened."

"How are you feeling, Uncle?" asked Lucille, solicitously.

"As well as could be expected of an old fellow whose bones are getting so brittle that they play all manner of tricks with him," he told her.

"But you must be suffering," Lucille continued, laying a cool hand on his brow, which Uncle Alvin

immediately clasped, and pressed against his lips, for Lucille was very dear to him.

"Oh! only a little now," he assured her, and if he stretched the truth it was only with the intention of sparing her needless mental pain; "you know, when you get hurt pretty badly there's often a merciful numbness sets in right away that helps you stand it. That's Nature's assistance. The worst is yet to come, when the doctor sets that arm. But I'm thankful it wasn't either of you."

Uncle Alvin was always thinking of others, which was doubtless why every one seemed to love the little old gentleman.

"Good! there comes the moon out again!" exclaimed Tom, whose eyes were becoming strained by his efforts to discern the road ahead.

"If it had only stayed out all the while we might have avoided that accident, because we'd have made better time," Lucille observed.

"I wouldn't say that, girlie," Uncle Alvin told her; "always look on the bright side of things. No matter what happens, it might have been worse. Suppose we had the benefit of the moon, don't you know we might have arrived at that terrible bend when the other car struck us? We mustn't complain, or find fault, but take things as they come."

Lucille said nothing more, for in her heart she realized that Uncle Alvin was right.

Tom was secretly apprehensive about the condition of the patient. It may not mean a great deal for a healthy lad to break his arm, since the bone knits quickly; but with a man considerably over sixty the case is quite different.

Then again, it could not be told what the effect of this shock would be upon the old gentleman's system. He was subject to strokes of some kind, which would indicate that his health was breaking down, for Uncle Alvin had led an exceedingly active life, and suffered many privations in his time.

Until the patient had had a thorough examination at the hands of a physician Tom would not be free from anxiety. He tried to look the matter calmly in the face as he sat there, sending the car on with considerable speed, now that the road was better. They must make up their minds to stay at the hospital, or close by, for an indefinite period, until the injured man was in a condition to travel.

"I can see the town now, Tom," announced Lucille, cheerfully.

"Yes, we'll be there in a jiffy," he told her; "and after we do get in, you must find out where the hospital is, because you know I can't *parley-voo* worth a cent."

"I'm glad girls can be of some use," said Lucille; at which Uncle Alvin squeezed the little hand he was holding, and hastened to say:

"The world could never exist without girls.

Tom knows it as well as I do, if I have lived to be an old bachelor, much to my regret. But unless I miss my guess that building ahead is likely to be the one we're looking for, children."

Uncle Alvin proved to be right, for upon Lucille hailing a man who was passing along, dressed in his military clothes, and evidently hastening to a rendezvous, to make inquiries, he told her politely it was the hospital they were approaching.

Ten minutes afterwards Uncle Alvin had been carefully carried in on a stretcher, by two attendants. He would be examined and the result soon known.

Meanwhile Tom and his sister waited in the office, and counted the minutes that must elapse before the examination would be finished.

"This is a tough ending to our fine vacation tour, I must say," Tom grumbled, as he strode up and down, being too nervous to sit still.

"Yes, that's so," Lucille replied, "but if only uncle gets over his injuries I'm not going to complain."

"I guess you're about right, sis, as you nearly always are," Tom admitted. "It's a shame for me to growl, when I got off with hardly a scratch. But I wish they'd hurry up. Seems like a terrible long time since they took him into the operating room."

"I think they'll set his arm while they have him

there," she told him, "and get it all over with. I own up that I'm shivering right now, for fear something is going to happen."

"And that isn't like you, either, sis," Tom declared, stopping to lay his hand caressingly on her shoulder, for they were more like chums than brother and sister. "I guess you've got a case of nerves from that shock, and I don't blame you a bit. Gee! it made me feel creepy all over when I saw that car jump into sight like a big black barn, and felt the crack as it struck us."

"Oh! Tom, I think they're coming out now!" suddenly said Lucille, and Tom could see that the color had forsaken her usually rosy cheeks.

The hospital doctor approached them. Tom tried to tell from his face whether he was bringing them good or bad news; but he found that the man of medicine was so in the habit of masking his feelings that this was utterly out of the question.

It was a different matter with Lucille, however. As soon as she had asked several questions in a trembling voice her eyes began to sparkle, and the red to return to her cheeks; all of which told Tom that the news must have been at least fairly favorable.

As the doctor walked quickly away again, Lucille turned on her brother.

"It's favorable, then, sis?" asked Tom.

"Oh! yes, yes, I am so glad to tell you, Tom," she declared, almost shedding tears.

"Uncle will live, he told you, did he?" continued the boy, feeling a vast relief on account of the good news.

"He says there is every chance of his pulling through," continued Lucille, gravely; "but, Tom, it would be dangerous to move him. It's partly owing to his condition, for you know yourself uncle is far from a well man. The doctor says he must remain here for some weeks at least."

"Whew! and what will we be doing all that time?"

"We can find a place to board nearby, he told me, and be with uncle every day. There are plenty of interesting walks all around the town, if we want exercise. He did hint at the possibility of the war finding us here, though no one can say as to that, because it's too early. If the Germans do invade France they may come through here, and again they may pass around."

"Let's hope it'll be the last way, then," said Tom, "because we'd be up against it good and hard if we got caught in the midst of such fierce fighting as these two armies will do, when they get hammering at each other. Oh! well, I'm so glad to know uncle may pull through, that I'll try and not complain."

It was evident to Lucille, knowing her brother as she did, that this tame way of spending his vacation abroad was quite disheartening to Tom. They might have done almost as well in their far-distant American home.

While talking over the situation, trying to cheer each other up, neither could foresee what remarkable happenings were in store for them, a little later on, when a ring of iron would surround that little town in the French hills, and the roar of battle rend the atmosphere with sledge-hammer blows.

CHAPTER XII

CAUGHT LIKE RATS IN A TRAP

“I’VE just had a little talk with young Doctor Jacques, the only surgeon left here these days, Tom; and he says there’s no reason why Uncle Alvin could not take a journey. I’ll be happy when we start out for Paris again.”

When Lucille said this to her brother weeks had passed since their arrival at the hospital in that town of Northern France.

Day after day they had waited, at first with considerable anxiety, fearing that an unfavorable turn would come in the illness of the injured one. Then by slow degrees the broken bone began to knit, and Uncle Alvin was so well looked after that he quickly began to improve.

The time of weary waiting Tom and Lucille had passed in various ways. They could not read, because nothing reached the town of consequence save an occasional newspaper from the capital; so Lucille improved her French by talking with the doctor, or the Red Cross nurses, or any one she happened to meet in their long walks.

They knew something about the course of events outside that peaceful haven. Especially had they

learned that the mighty army of the Kaiser had swept past like a tidal wave, pushing all resistance aside.

Later had come the distressing news that the invading force was before Paris, which had prepared for another siege. Then came a day of thrilling joy to the people of that French town, when the word was flashed to them that von Kluck's army had been defeated by the Allies in a fiercely contested battle on the Marne. (See Note 3.)

Even then it was mostly all a blank, for no one knew what would happen next. In their retreat toward the border it was possible that this host of incensed invaders might cover the entire territory, so as to hold the enemy in check. This move would mean disaster to every town north of the River Aisne; for when a battle is raging between armies even churches are not always respected, and the humble homes of the people are utterly destroyed.

It was just at this momentous period in the making of history that Lucille came to her brother as he was sitting on the edge of the porch, and related what the surgeon had told her.

This young medical man was the only doctor left in the hospital now; for with the increasing fury of the war both the older ones had been called to the front, where their services would be in urgent demand.

Somehow Tom Maillard did not appear to show as much animation as Lucille had expected, on the receipt of her joyous intelligence. She was used to reading his face, and immediately jumped to a conclusion.

"You're keeping something from me, Tom, you know you are!" she exclaimed, with a tone of reproach in her voice.

Tom gave a nervous laugh.

"Well, I suppose it's got to come out, sooner or later, Lucille," he told her.

"Something has happened, then?" the girl continued, beginning to look somewhat worried, for these long weeks of waiting were trying to even her well balanced nerves.

"Oh! I wouldn't call it that!" said Tom, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I guess uncle must have expected they'd take it, from things he let fall, and so I had to tell him; but he thought there was no need of bothering you about it right then."

"Is it about our car, Tom?" she asked him, quickly.

"Yes, that's what it is."

"You mean they've taken it from us?"

He nodded his head in the affirmative, though trying to smile, and look as if it did not matter a great deal.

"When did it happen, Tom?" was her next question.

"I guess about the fourth day after we got here," Tom explained. "You know I told you I thought I'd better hide it out there in the barn, by scattering some hay over it? Well, some one must have told, for while you were in with uncle one day, an officer and two privates came to me, and being able to speak English fairly well, demanded that I turn over the car for the use of France."

"Of course you had to do it; you couldn't save the car, could you, Tom?" Lucille continued, her white teeth pressed hard together in a way that seemed to say had she been there she would have tried to defy the order, no matter if it was backed by the whole force of the French Government.

"Sure I did," he told her. "They knew where it was, and I saw I might as well throw up the sponge gracefully. Well, the officer had the politeness to thank me for *lending* the car to France, at a time when she needed all the help possible, and he acted as if he was sorry to have to strip us of our means of getting away from here with uncle. I kind of liked that fellow, he was so nice about it."

"But that looks like next door to robbery, Tom, to take our car away from us," Lucille protested, still indignant.

"Oh! it was a case of military necessity, I guess. See, he gave me this little printed slip, filled out and signed. After the war is over the owner of the

car can present this to the Government at Paris, if there is any such place then, and collect damages for having his car commandeered."

Lucille took it pretty hard, nevertheless.

"It was a mean shame, and you can't convince me to the contrary, Tom," she told him, after glancing contemptuously at the paper he exhibited. "What good does that do us? It can't help get uncle away from here. I'm beginning to detest the whole place, after being kept here so long. It makes me feel as if we were in prison."

"That's hardly fair talk," Tom told her. "On the whole I think we've had a pretty decent time of it, what with our long walks, and the fun we had with our signal system. Why, you've learned to be a first-class operator with the wigwag code. That last message you flagged me with your handkerchief was as clean as a whistle; not a single letter out of the way, and rapid-fire work, too."

Lucille deigned to smile, just a little.

"Thank you for saying that, Tom," she told him. "I always did want to learn that signal work. And you know, some time or other in case we got separated while taking a long walk I expected it might come in handy. I always carry a small pocket mirror with me, and if the sun is shining I can talk with you in the helio code, too."

"Have you heard any later news about the war?" Tom asked, for he was compelled to depend

almost wholly on Lucille to pick up such information as drifted into the isolated town.

"Doctor Jacques says all they know is that the Germans have overrun Belgium; the Russians are fighting hard in Eastern Prussia, and the army of invasion, having turned back from Paris, is retreating right along, fighting rear-guard actions, and holding the French and British back."

"It's terrible to be shut up here away from the world, you might say, and not be able to read the news every morning," grumbled the boy.

"Oh! that isn't what worries me the most!" Lucille declared. "If I never read a single word of all the terrible fighting I'd be happy. But think of what a pickle we're in here, having uncle on our hands, and no way of getting out."

"Yes," pursued Tom seriously, a wrinkle appearing across his usually smooth forehead, "I've been bothering my brains about that, all right. The Germans may slip past us, and then try to hold the hills over there against the Allies. That would put this poor town part-way between the lines, and it would be smashed to flinders, once their guns got busy."

"We mustn't be here when that happens, Tom, it would be too terrible."

"Given half a chance, we'll skip out, all right," he assured her. "What else did the young doc. tell you?"

"He said he was anxious to go to join his chief at the front, but only half an hour ago he received a message telling him under no conditions to leave here, and to do everything possible to prepare for a big rush of patients!"

"That looks as though they expected a battle nearby," muttered Tom, as his eyes turned toward the hills which were so soon fated to become famous in the history of the great war.

"See what he gave me to fasten on my sleeve," continued Lucille, proudly.

"Why, it's a Red Cross badge, sure enough!" exclaimed Tom, "and let me tell you Doctor Jacques showed a lot of horse sense when he presented you with that. I always said you had the making of a nervy little nurse, and he knows it. Hasn't he let you do any amount of assisting him in certain cases here, not mentioning our own uncle? Will you sew it on your sleeve?"

"As soon as I go to my room," she told him, fondling the badge with its symbol of mercy as though she valued it highly.

"I'm more than glad you've got it," Tom told her, "and I'll tell you why. If the Germans do come this way, as looks likely, that badge will do more to protect you than anything else could."

"Yes," said Lucille, softly, "it is known all over the world to-day, and even the Turk respects it. But if we are forced to stay here, Tom, I mean to

do my part, and not just make believe. I've thought it all over, and my mind is made up."

"But we must try our best to get away from here before there really is any fighting," Tom insisted. "A battlefield isn't a good place for any girl to be about; it's hard enough on grown women who have been trained to seeing such things. But your saying that the Kaiser's troops have overrun pretty much all of Belgium makes me wonder what's happening to our friends there."

"Oh! yes, Mart and Harvey Dorr, and Mart's parents," added Lucille. "What if they have been caught between the lines there, and can't get away, just as we've had happen to us here?"

"Oh! it's different with them," continued Tom. "They could easy enough make the little run over to Antwerp, and then get a steamer across to London. We might have slipped down to Paris, too, only for that nasty spill we had that cooked our goose. I guess we're the only unlucky ones of the bunch." *

"This place is dead, with all the able-bodied men gone to join the colors," the girl observed, looking

* When Tom made this statement he of course had no knowledge of what was happening in Belgium, where the swift advance of the Kaiser's overwhelming army had paralyzed railway traffic in a night, so that tourists who were far in the country found themselves stranded far from the coast. As it happened, their two boy friends were caught in pretty much the same kind of a trap as that which now surrounded Lucille and her brother, as those who have read the preceding volume of this series, "Between the Lines in Belgium," already know.

off toward the hills again, as though wishing Tom might propose that they take one of their enjoyable long strolls that way.

"The time may come, and soon at that," Tom warned her, "when you'll be wishing it could be that way again. I can imagine what a terrible thing it'd be if the Germans entrenched along those hills, and all sorts of big guns were banging away day and night. I remember you telling me how peasants coming in from further north told stories about the mysterious work of large bodies of strange men who seemed to be doing something in many places, as though building concrete foundations for houses."

"Yes," Lucille said, hurriedly, "and when you told me that they might be German engineers at work, it gave me a shiver. You wouldn't say anything more then, Tom; but you might tell me now. What could they be doing up in the hills?"

"Well, I can only make a stab at it, sis, because I know little more than you do; but they say those terribly big cannon and mortars of the Germans have to have a solid foundation, and that they make this, when they can, out of concrete, generally some time ahead, so it may harden into stone."

"How wonderful," murmured Lucille. "Those Germans prepare for everything, it seems to me. Doctor Jacques says he believes they know all this country in the north of France even better than

people do who have lived here always. He says he thinks they have figured on just where every great gun should be placed to have the right range." (See Note 4.)

"I believe it!" exclaimed Tom, "and if the French ever get them across the border again they'll deserve all the praise going. But the way things look I'm afraid none of us will ever manage to get to Rome as we planned, so as to cross back home on the same steamer."

"And the wager you made with Harvey — what about that, Tom?"

The boy laughed, as though it amused him.

"Mighty little chance of Harv ever getting out of Belgium with that little camera of his," he told Lucille. "Right at this very minute the poor fellow may be twiddling his thumbs inside some dungeon, while the military authorities decide whether he's only a silly American tourist trying to break the law, or a German spy, trying to get pictures of the Belgian forts."

"It was a foolish wager, Tom, and I'm sorry you ever made it," Lucille remarked.

"Huh! same here; but who'd ever have thought at that time the whole of Europe would be marching armies to battle? I hope Mart and Harvey managed to get away. It's bad enough for us to be caught like rats in the measly old trap."

"Listen! I'm sure I heard loud voices then, Tom!"

"And you didn't make any mistake, either," he assured her. "It's down that road yonder. There's a wheezy old vehicle of some sort coming into town, and the driver is whipping his horses. Evidently they're in a hurry."

"Could it be the Germans have been chasing them?" Lucille asked, hastily.

"Oh! I don't know," replied Tom. "But what's that I hear?"

"A woman's voice, and speaking English, too!" echoed Lucille. "It must be another batch of tourists caught up here by the stopping of all trains, who are trying to make their way out. There they come, Tom! Oh! what an awful looking outfit, with that weak-kneed horse, and such a ramshackle wagon!"

"But how's this, sis? We've seen that pair before — the little runt of a man, and the big woman who bosses the home camp! Why, as sure as anything it was over in London. They were on top of a motor 'bus going along the Strand. And to think of our running across them away over in this out-of-the-way place in France!"

CHAPTER XIII

MORE REFUGEES

"It's good to see some one again who can talk English decently," Lucille observed, as they watched the hurried approach of the strange outfit.

"Look at the lady, will you?" chuckled Tom. "She even uses her umbrella to hurry up that poor old nag."

"And every once in so often she turns to her husband to tell him to do something. I feel sorry for him, Tom. He looks as though he might be a nice sort of little gentleman, if you could get him away from that Tartar."

"Hush! don't talk so loud; she might hear you. But let me tell you, I'll be tickled half to death to have somebody else to bother with my talking besides you."

The wretched rig drew near. Then the little man jumped spryly out, and in the most gallant fashion possible endeavored to sustain the weight of his stout companion. Lucille held her breath while this operation was going on, as though she feared that the puny husband might be crushed.

After that the lady turned, and dickered with the peasant who apparently owned the miserable

horse, which had escaped the eye of the commanding officers simply because it was not worth taking. He apparently felt grateful for what he received, for he made many servile bows, and remounting his wagon commenced to urge his horse off, as though he feared that she might repent of her liberality.

The couple then came up on the porch, and found themselves face to face with Tom and his sister. Lucille, perhaps with pardonable vanity, had hastily managed to pin the magical strip of white linen with its Red Cross to her left sleeve. Of course she preferred that these strangers should recognize her as a hospital nurse. After they had become better acquainted it would be time to tell her of the true facts of their isolation.

"This is a hospital, I understand?" the stout English lady remarked, for she must have judged from the appearance of Tom and his sister that they could not be French.

"Yes, we have an uncle here who was injured in an automobile accident some time ago," Lucille hastened to remark, already forgetting her resolution. "That has kept us here. Our car was taken by the military authorities, and so we have stayed on, hoping to get away soon. I have been making myself useful as a nurse while here, you see, ma'am," pointing to the emblem on her arm.

"There, Sir Archibald, what did I tell you as

soon as I saw these young people? They looked anything but Frenchy to me. I'm glad to meet you, my dear. I'm Lady Featherstone, and this is my husband, Sir Archibald. He has injured his shoulder, and when I heard there was such a thing as a hospital handy I insisted that he have it attended to immediately."

Tom had hard work to keep from smiling as he remembered how in spite of all this she had not hesitated to lean heavily on poor Sir Archibald when getting down from the wagon.

But both the young people were so delighted to hear the familiar sound of their native tongue again, that they felt they could put up with almost anything.

"Have you been caught over here by the war, ma'am?" Tom asked, "for my sister and I remember seeing you both on the Strand one day, while we were in London."

That seemed to please the stout lady. She smiled as she threw a quick look over toward her small mate.

"There, you see, Sir Archibald, I told you we attracted considerable attention wherever we went. But it is as you say, my lad, we were caught over here when the war broke out. For a long time we have been trying our very best to get *somewhere*; but no trains are running save those carrying troops and guns and all such terrible munitions

of war. If you will take us to where we can see the surgeon, we can afterwards have a nice little chat, and become better acquainted."

Of course Tom and Lucille had no hesitation about doing this.

"You look tired, darling," said Sir Archibald, quickly, interfering with the arrangement; "suppose this young man accompanies me to the office of the hospital, while you remain here and rest. I'm sure the young lady will stay with you. Afterwards they may be kind enough to direct us to some place where we can find lodgings temporarily."

Tom fancied that the little baronet was glad of a chance to get away from his wife, if only for a short season. She talked so much, and in so loud a voice, that it must be pleasant to shut out the sound once in a while.

Doctor Jacques was found without any trouble, and an examination of the injured shoulder proved that there was nothing serious the matter.

"I had a bad slip on the rocks a day or two back," explained the Englishman, as the hospital doctor anointed his injury with some soothing and healing salve; "we were hiding in a town where the Germans had left a guard at the time they passed toward Paris, and it became necessary that we depart in the night time, or fall into their hands. We had the misfortune to trip and fall, and — er, well, I managed to be underneath, and got this beastly

bruise. It's pained me for days, and needed some sort of attention. My word! but you've put some magical ointment on it, Doctor."

Afterwards he drew Tom aside.

"Don't let's bother them out there on the porch yet," he explained. Tom, who could read between the lines, willingly agreed to stroll off with him a bit, knowing that Lucille would be capable of entertaining the lady, who was doubtless interested in drawing out the story of their adventures.

The boy found the queer little English baronet quite a character. Tom was quick to take a liking for any one who appealed to him, and that was what Sir Archibald did immediately. While in the presence of his better half he might seem crushed and tame; once free from her domineering he could display an almost boyish disposition.

When it is remembered that for many long days Tom had found no one save Lucille with whom he could exchange opinions, because he did not speak the language of the country, it is easy to understand how he felt drawn toward the newcomer.

On his part Sir Archibald seemed to find the attraction mutual.

"My word!" he kept saying every little while. "I certainly am delighted to have run across such a sensible chap over here, as you seem, Tom. I want to meet this uncle of yours, too, for he must be a brick. And since we're all in the same boat,

why not throw our fortunes in a lump, and stick by each other? How does that strike you, my boy?"

"I think it would be a good thing," Tom assured him. "Five of us ought to be in better shape to find a way out than either two or three. And if the Germans come here, as we're Americans perhaps we could be of some help to you and the lady. You, being English, might have a hard time of it with them."

"My word! I've a good notion to take you into my confidence, I declare I have," said the other, effusively. Then, as though he had made up his mind, he plunged a hand into an inner pocket, to bring to light a paper which he carefully unfolded.

"What's that, sir?" asked Tom curiously, and yet at the same time amused by the mysterious manner of the other.

"These are my credentials from a leading London newspaper," replied Sir Archibald, proudly. "You see, I am a war correspondent, authorized to collect news, and to transmit it to my paper. This document should command the respect of every German commander. They might send me to the rear as a nuisance, but they could never treat me rudely as a suspicious person."

"Do you think they will get here, then?" asked Tom.

"Undoubtedly, my son," he was told. "Why, if you will listen carefully at this very minute you

can hear the sound of their heavy guns far down toward the south. It is a low grumble, as if a summer storm might be creeping up above the distant horizon."

Tom was thrilled when he heard this.

"My sister asked me about that a while ago," he observed, "and I told her it must be the passing of trains carrying soldiers or supplies to the German army, because of course they must control all the roads up in this part of France now."

"You were mistaken, Tom," Sir Archibald continued, gravely; "what you hear is the roar of cannon. Wherever that is going on depend upon it there are lively events taking place. I only wish I could be an eye witness to everything. I was just telling Samantha — er, Lady Featherstone, that in these days all war correspondents should be supplied with aeroplanes, and be allowed the privilege of flying over the field of battle at their pleasure."

After half an hour of chatting, which Tom enjoyed very much, the little baronet led the way back to the porch, where his lady awaited him.

"What did the surgeon say about your shoulder, Sir Archibald?" she demanded.

"Oh! it is nothing serious, I assure you," her husband replied. "Neglect caused much of the pain, and a little inflammation has set in; but he put some ointment on the bruise that acted like magic. My word! but I must find out its nature,

and never go without a supply. It is simply wonderful, my dear."

After that Tom and Lucille guided the strangely assorted pair to the inn at which they had been staying all these trying weeks. Here accommodations were easily obtained, though the landlord shrugged his shoulders, and confessed that he could not assure them peace and quiet.

"We have this day heard that the Germans are everywhere near," he told them, for both Sir Archibald and his lady spoke French fluently, being great travelers; "and so, if it is here they come presently they will confiscate all supplies, and treat us as we hear they did those poor people in Belgium, whose city they burned. It would be wise for monsieur and madame to get away while a chance remains."

"My word! that is what we would like to do," Tom heard the little man mutter, as he rubbed his bald head in a puzzled way. "But it is impossible for my wife to do any great amount of walking, you see, and so I'm stuck. But I had to fetch her with me, or give up the chance for glory. I am in a bad fix, believe me."

The war correspondent's wife seemed to have a keen sense for news, at least, for she was quizzing the inn-keeper, and trying to pick up scraps of information in that way.

"Did you hear that, Sir Archibald?" she would cry out every little while. "Put that in your next

letter from the front. It will give the British public something to sit up over, nights, and keep the recruiting active."

On each and every occasion the little man was expected to hastily produce a pad of paper, together with a pencil, and fire away as though he were in touch with a wire that led directly into the editor's den of a London daily.

Dinner came and went, finding them later on sitting outside in the shade, for the day was quite hot, and even sultry.

"It seems to me," Tom remarked to the baronet, as they sat with their feet elevated on the railing of the porch, a habit the baronet must have picked up during his travels in America, "I can hear that muttering noise easier than before. Has the wind veered any, do you think, Sir Archibald?"

"Indeed, there has hardly been a zephyr since early morning, and it still comes from the same quarter," the other replied. "If you really want to know what I believe, Tom, I'll tell you. The battle line is backing up this way! The Germans are in retreat, but fighting every mile, and holding their front steady!"

Tom drew a long breath.

"That would mean they may be here before a great while?" he suggested, uneasily.

"Perhaps by to-morrow," answered the little man, who seemed to be fairly well posted on mili-

tary matters, though he could never have been in the army, his lack of inches and not the want of martial valor, serving as a barrier; "certainly the day after, we can look for those hills to be filled with Germans and their big guns."

"Do you have any idea they'll try to stop there and fight, sir?" questioned Tom.

"I certainly do," he was informed, soberly, "and for this reason: I know that in many places up there they have prepared concrete foundations for their immense howitzers that throw those terrible shells. I have seen such places myself. What amazes me is the fact that the French, usually so smart and suspicious, should have been blind to all the preparations that have been going on for years, looking to just such an emergency as this." (See Note 5.)

"But if that happens this town will be right between the two hostile armies, isn't it so, sir?" Tom continued.

"Unfortunately, yes, that is what is likely to happen, sooner or later," the baronet replied. "I can only hope all of us manage to get away before that time comes, for I fear that there will hardly be one stone left on another here. The poor people to keep from being slaughtered like sheep must either fly, or else hide in their cellars."

"Then we must try the best we know how to get through the line of the Allies," Tom declared, with a wisdom far in excess of his years.

"That of course is the only discreet thing to do," Sir Archibald admitted. Then hastily fixing his monocle in his left eye he proceeded to stare down the very road over which he and his wife had entered the town some hours before.

Tom, attracted by this movement, looked also.

"It's a man, running as though wild!" he exclaimed, jumping to his feet.

"And it must mean that something is chasing after him," said Lucille. "See how he turns and looks back with each dozen jumps. There, he is trying to shout, now, but he has so little breath he can hardly do much. But listen! I can make out what he is calling, I believe."

Tom noticed with one swift glance that his sister had turned very white.

"What does he say, then, sis?" he asked, coaxingly.

"The Germans are coming, is what he is trying to shout as a warning to the townspeople!" the girl replied, trying to keep her voice steady.

"I expected this, but not quite so soon," remarked the little baronet, who somehow appeared to be the coolest member of the party.

CHAPTER XIV

THE UHLAN RAIDERS

THEY stood watching what followed with a strange sensation of coming evil tugging at their hearts. Others had by now taken up the cry, and it was spreading all over the town.

Despite the fact that the French people had been anticipating the coming of the first detachment of Germans for days, and had arranged just how they should act so as to avoid drawing down swift punishment upon the town, accompanied by the burning of houses and public buildings, every one manifested the greatest excitement.

Old men hurried to the open square, where the mayor of the town would most likely await the coming of the hostile force. Women gathered their children together, and talked like magpies as they clustered in frightened knots.

Even the dogs seemed to share in the common alarm, slinking around with drooping tails. The feeling was in the air that disaster threatened that thriving French town.

"There they come!" exclaimed Tom, whose sharp eyes had detected a cloud of dust rising beyond a bend in the white road.

"They are horsemen!" observed the lady. "What would you make of them, Sir Archibald?"

"Can you see the lances they carry, my dear?" he asked. "That stamps them as German cavalrymen, called Uhlans. Like the Russian Cossacks they charge with lances, and inflict terrible wounds. Yes, these are Uhlans; possibly a detachment far ahead of the main army."

The rough riders came swinging into view until it could be seen that there were more than two score of them. They kept a constant lookout for any ambuscade; and had a single shot been fired no doubt they were ready to display the fierce spirit that has always been attached to the name of Uhlan.

Dusty, and with weary horses, they came on. Soon they arrived at the border of the town, when, as if acting under orders previously given, they began to scatter in several directions.

The officer who seemed to be in command, with a small detachment, continued on to where he could see that the mayor of the town awaited him. Doubtless the poor official wished to assure the soldiers that no hostile act was contemplated which might arouse their anger, and call down bitter reprisals on the heads of his peace-loving people.

Tom, curious to know what was going on, started toward the open square, which happened to be quite close to the inn. It did not surprise the boy to find that Lucille had tripped after him, for she never

hesitated at accepting any risks he chose to endure — Lucille had always been as good as any boy chum he knew, in that respect.

“I hope they’ll behave like gentlemen, Tom,” she said as she came alongside her brother.

“Well, all I can wish,” he remarked, drily, “is that they act like human beings; because soldiers in a hostile country can’t always be gentlemen, you know. Perhaps if they’re treated decently, and given all the food and wine they want, they may go away again, and leave us alone.”

“That officer looks civilized enough,” Lucille continued, as they approached the spot where the mayor was delivering his little speech in a trembling voice.

“Why shouldn’t he?” demanded Tom; “chances are if you knew him in his home town you’d find he was of good breeding. He looks like a man who won’t be trifled with, and if anybody starts to shooting around here, something will happen. But I guess the mayor has warned every one to behave.”

“So that’s what they have to do when an enemy comes into a town, is it?” asked Lucille, a little indignantly.

“Well,” Tom told her, “the first thing girls and women have to learn is to hold their tongues. It saves heaps of trouble in the end.”

“I’ve known some boys to get in a bad fix by talking too much, let me tell you, smarty,” Lucille retorted.

"That's right," Tom told her, "it isn't confined to girls, I guess. But listen to what they're saying, and translate it. I've only got the motions and the faces they make to tell me what little I can understand."

"Why, the mayor is telling the officer that he need not fear any outbreak on the part of the townspeople, for they know their duty, and will entertain him and his men as well they are able. He hopes they will be treated even as the Uhlans would want the people in their native town to be in case the tables were turned."

"And what does the captain answer?" asked Tom.

"He talks a horrible brand of French, half of it German, I believe," she replied in dismay; "but as near as I can make out he is telling the mayor it will be well for the people if they do behave themselves, and obey as they are ordered. These are war times, he says, and a single treacherous act may start the cavalrymen to shooting up the town."

"Well, it's just about what I expected," Tom muttered, "and all I can say is I hope there isn't any half-witted boy loose, who might think it glorious sport to try to pot a Prussian."

"There, he has seen us, Tom, and is beckoning," said Lucille. "We had better go up and try to talk with him, hadn't we? I hope he can speak English better than he does French."

"Yes, let's go; and, Lucille, leave most of the talking to me this time. It's my inning, remember."

"Just as you say, Tom," she returned, very meekly for one of her independent nature, Tom thought.

Perhaps Lucille did not fancy the looks of the German officer any too well. She favored the French, partly because they were the weaker parties in this terrible struggle; had been whipped in the previous war and were being made victims of that wonderful German war machine of which so much had been written. Then besides, Lucille could not forget that her family was of French descent, and that made a vast difference.

"Are you English, boy?" demanded the officer of the Uhlans, frowning severely as the two came close up to him.

Tom was determined not to show any signs of fear, though at the same time he had also made up his mind not to be rash or impudent.

"Oh! no, we are Americans!" he hastened to reply.

The German's face lighted up at that; at the same time he was cautious, and did not mean to take the simple word of a boy for such a thing. These British, he fancied, would not be above allowing their half-grown lads who played at soldiering under the name of Boy Scouts, to come over here and act as spies.

"I am glad to know that," he told Tom, "and I suppose you can show me something to prove your words? I have myself spent some years in New York. We want the American people to think well of our conquest of France, and Great Britain. How is it we find you here in this French town, when you have had plenty of time to escape? It is strange."

"We were on an automobile tour of Northern France when the war suddenly broke out," Tom told him. "Besides myself and my sister, there is our uncle, now an inmate of the hospital up yonder."

"He was injured, then; tell me how?" queried the Uhlan officer.

"We started in the night to head for Paris," the boy began. "Our chauffeur had to quit us because he was an artilleryman, and must hurry to his place in one of the French fortresses on the border. So I drove the car. The road led over hills, and in places they were very steep. It was on one of these that we met with an accident."

"You ran into a ditch, it may be?" suggested the other.

"Not quite that bad, Captain," replied Tom, without showing that he felt offended by the insinuation that he was not a safe driver. "A car filled with French officers, hurrying to their mobilization center, came down the descent. They had no lights, and ours were very poor. So there was a collision,

although I kept as far to the right as I could, and poor uncle was badly hurt."

"Then you brought him here, did you?" continued the cavalryman, seemingly impressed with the frank and fearless bearing of the boy; it may be he himself had just such a son at home, for his eyes kindled as he watched every movement Tom Mailard made.

"Yes, sir," the lad resumed; "the officers had to leave us in a hurry, after making sure that our car was still fit to run; but they told us about this town, and that we would find a hospital here. We have had to remain ever since, sir, which as you may know was pretty galling to us when we wanted to be on the way home."

"Just on account of the man who was injured, do you mean, boy?"

"Well," Tom assured him, "mostly that; but as the French Government commandeered our car four days after we landed here, we could not have gone, even if my uncle had been well enough."

The Uhlan captain shook his head.

"It is too bad," he remarked, "because now you are hemmed in by a wall of steel, and it may be impossible for you to get through. Our army is coming to take up positions that have already been arranged, and where they can snap their fingers at all the Allies in France to budge them. And as this little town lies in the cup between, it is likely there

will be very little left of it by the time Winter sets in. What did you say your name was, boy?"

"It is Thomas Maillard, Captain, and this is my sister, Lucille. I can show you letters from our folks over in America, if you care to take the time to read any of them."

He held up several which he had been carrying in his pocket ever since they left Paris, so that the edges of the envelopes looked frayed and worn. The Uhlan officer only glanced at them, as though convinced from the United States stamps and the post-marks that they were genuine.

"Yes, I see that is your name, and these letters were sent to Paris," he continued. "It is all right, then, and I believe you are what you say."

He looked over at Lucille, as though attracted by her rosy cheeks and bright eyes. Tom, wishing to confine the attention of the Uhlan to himself, immediately asked:

"You will not think it worth while to detain us, Captain, will you? Our uncle, Alvin Maillard, is in the hospital, where you can see him if you want, and find out the same things I have told you."

"No, there is no need of bothering either you or your pretty sister, Thomas. We Germans do not make war on women or children, nor yet on manly-looking lads who have bright faces like yours. But if you take my advice you will leave this hapless town at once."



“Surround that man, and if he tries to escape cut him down like a wolf!”

"We'd be only too glad to do that, Captain, if you could only tell us how we can go," Tom explained. "Our poor uncle is still weak, and could not stand a long tramp over the hills this hot weather. We could perhaps manage to get him several miles off, and that would be a help."

"Get out before three days have gone, at the most," the soldier warned him. "That is all I dare tell you. Perhaps somewhere you might manage to find a horse that was passed by when the French combed this neighborhood for mounts, and animals to draw their guns. Hire it, beg it, steal it, but get a horse by any means. Three of you should not find it so hard to escape from the net. The French would let you pass through their lines, it might be."

"There are five of us now, Captain."

Tom would not have said this only he happened to discover Sir Archibald and his wife walking slowly toward them. The little baronet had evidently been unable to hold back any longer. Curiosity to know what was transpiring had gained the mastery over his natural caution. Perhaps the newsgathering instinct had something to do with it, too; for war reporters soon get to be utterly reckless of their own lives in pursuit of "beats" in the way of soul-stirring "copy."

"What do you mean by that, boy?" demanded the Uhlan, suspiciously.

"There are two other tourists who have been

stranded up here, and want to get to Paris again," Tom told him.

Seeing that the boy was looking in a certain direction the captain also turned his eyes that way. Just then Sir Archibald, accompanied by his buxom better half, chanced to be close by.

The little baronet was stalking along with his chest thrown out, and assuming a very important and business-like air. Tom would have been inclined to laugh at his assumed superior manner, only that the conditions were too grave to admit of such levity.

He rather expected to find that the big Uhlan officer would be struck by the comical character of the ill-assorted pair; but just the contrary seemed to be the case. Hearing a low exclamation from the soldier, Tom looked up at him as he sat his saddle. He was immediately conscious of a disturbing sensation around the region of his heart; for he saw that the officer was frowning blackly.

For a brief space of time the leader of the Uhlans continued to stare and grumble and frown. Then he called out sharply. It must have been to some of his men that he spoke, for three of them immediately detached themselves from the main body.

As has been said before Tom had a little knowledge of German. He could not have carried on even a simple conversation in the language; but with such smattering of words as he did know, he was

able to grasp fairly well the tenor of the gruff order which the Uhlan captain thundered out.

“Surround that man, and if he tries to escape cut him down like a wolf! He answers the description of the most dangerous English spy we have against us!”

While Tom and his sister stood there, almost incapable of motion, they saw the three cavalrymen dash out and close in around Sir Archibald; who made no attempt at resistance, but placing his monocle in his left eye stared blandly at the circle of horsemen that now encompassed him.

CHAPTER XV

TAKEN FOR A SPY

“My word! but this *is* sudden!”

That was what Tom heard the baronet remark as the Uhlans closed around him, and from the flourishing of their lances made it plain that he would attempt resistance at his peril.

Indeed, resistance was apparently the last thing Sir Archibald thought of. He had evidently long ago learned to present a passive front when in contact with a superior force.

His wife, however, was threatening to go into hysterics. Evidently the Uhlan captain did not fancy having his plans interfered with by a mere woman, for he frowned savagely at Lady Featherstone, and made an autocratic movement with his arm.

Then he shouted an order to the three mounted soldiers. It must have been to remove the prisoner, for they immediately started to urge the diminutive baronet to move on.

“As for you, madam,” the officer continued, changing to English, “if you know what is good for you, be off at once to the hotel, and stay there the rest of the time we are in occupation here. We do

not war on women, but it must be to their regret if they dare interfere with our plans. A word should be enough for you."

"But you are making a terrible mistake!" she called out, even as others of the guard were urging her to move along. "Sir Archibald is too brave to beg you to listen to him. He is not what you claim — a spy. It is absurd — ridiculous!"

The Uhlan only laughed mockingly. He seemed rather pleased over something; and Tom speedily learned what amused him, though he had to guess at many of the words.

"So he is a Sir Archibald, is he?" he heard the captain say to the orderly near him; "then it is as I believed, and he is an English spy. He must be held until our colonel arrives with the rest of the command. If he thinks the same as myself, we may have the pleasure of shooting Sir Archibald before we leave this place."

Apparently the affair sat lightly on the mind of the Uhlan, for he immediately turned toward Tom, and with a friendly nod remarked:

"If then you have been here so long, you should know where the best dinner could be had; is it not so, my boy?"

Tom knew that it was the part of wisdom for him to retain the good will of this reckless raider. Accordingly he hastened to assure him on this point.

"My sister and myself have been stopping at an

inn close by, Captain; I will lead you there if you say the word."

"Tell me," the other continued, sitting sideways in his hard saddle, "is the eating worth while? This French cooking does not set well on a German stomach; but then we must eat, and it was many hours ago that we had our breakfast."

"We have found the meals very satisfactory," Tom replied; "and if you have time to spare I've no doubt the cook will be glad to get you up any sort of dish you might like."

"Well, it's a case of taking what offers, or going hungry, so lead on, my boy. I shall warn the keeper of the hotel that he himself must taste every dish set before me. I take no chances with these Frenchmen who have a forty-year hate burning in their souls."

Two of his men accompanied him, as they seemed to be something above the rank of privates, possibly non-commissioned officers. Tom managed to steal a look toward the spot where the three Uhlans stood guard over the suspected spy.

"Well, I take off my hat to that little baronet for coolness," he said to himself, when he saw Sir Archibald calmly sitting on a bench, puffing away at his briarwood pipe, as though quite at peace with the world.

Tom found it impossible to decide whether this was the confidence of innocence — ignorance of the

really desperate nature of his situation — or the natural coolness of the man in the face of deadly peril.

Up in the window above he could see the baronet's wife. She seemed to be sitting where she could keep her eyes fastened on the scene before the inn. Tom began to realize that in spite of her apparent bullying ways she did care considerably for the smaller half of the firm.

"Honestly," he afterwards told Lucille, when speaking of the matter, "I begin to believe she is really human, and not so much of a tyrant as we've been thinking. She looked as though she felt like flying at that captain, and trying to pull him off his horse when he called Sir Archibald a spy. And right now I guess she's trying to think up some way to rescue him."

The worthy innkeeper was waiting to receive them. He looked badly frightened, because this was his first experience with German invaders; and all sorts of terrible stories must have been rife in that community as to the fierce nature of these Uhlan cavalrymen.

Rubbing his hands together and trying to assume a pleasant look the landlord welcomed the captain to his humble hostelry.

As he could not understand much German, and the soldier was no French scholar, it quickly became apparent that there might be more or less confusion,

and a hitch in the arrangements, unless some one came to their assistance.

Lucille proved herself handy about this, as well as Tom. They indicated to the Uhlan captain that if he would specify what dishes he was particularly fond of they would give the order to the innkeeper, who was very desirous of pleasing him.

"We have no time for that, little fraulein," the captain told her, with what was meant to be a beaming smile; "so please inform him that he is to set forth what he happens to have prepared, hot or cold it matters little, only that there is enough!"

So the girl, turning upon the landlord, repeated the order. When it became apparent that this was understood from the nods of the other, the soldier spoke again:

"Also tell him not to forget the wine. Of what use is it to be in France if one cannot wash down the dust of these white roads? Plenty of it, remember!"

When this command had been properly transmitted, and the manner of the innkeeper indicated that it was fully understood, he was about to withdraw, after numerous polite bows, when the captain thundered out again:

"Wait! Tell him no frogs must be placed before us. We eat everything that is good, but draw the line at snails and frogs and such stuff. Yes, and please warn him that he shall stand beside me and

be my taster as I enjoy my meal. If it doesn't kill a Frenchman surely a German should be safe."

Lucille duly translated this last information, though she had some difficulty in keeping her face straight. Knowing the innkeeper as well as she did, she was sure he would never harm a fly if he could help it; much less dream of attempting to injure human beings in such a fashion.

He looked worried, as any one well might, on learning that he was held in such suspicion, and with sundry shrugs and gestures proceeded to pour out his protestations to Lucille. She duly translated the same to the officer, who seemed satisfied, for he waved the proprietor away.

In due time the table was spread, and as there happened to be an abundance of prepared food on hand at the time, the eyes of the three Germans fairly glistened as they sat down.

Tom and Lucille lingered. They did not expect that their services would be needed any further, but felt a curiosity to see whether the Uhlan captain would actually compel the wretched landlord, who had already had his dinner, to partake of a portion of every dish that happened to suit his eye.

He certainly proved to be a man of his word, for the first thing he did was to turn to Lucille and remark:

"Tell him that when I point to a certain dish he is to immediately eat some of it. And every fresh

bottle of wine must show that it has not been tampered with, or he will have to test it by a cup."

The innkeeper tried to smile as he learned what was expected of him, but Tom thought he looked distressed.

"I should hate to be in his boots just now," he said, aside to Lucille, "because I got away with an enormous dinner only a little while back."

"But this is war time, you know, Tom," she told him, humorously, "when men have to show what heroes they can be. And they are making the poor landlord eat pretty generous portions in the bargain."

Things seemed to be working smoothly by this time. After the "taster" had done his best to convince his tormentors that certain dishes were immune from dangerous properties the German officer helped his men and then himself bountifully, and proceeded to "feed." That was what Tom called it later on, when trying to recall the queer happening; for they bolted their food like hungry dogs.

Only once did the captain look up, and then happening to discover what he may have thought was an expression of awe on the face of Lucille, he nodded his head, and said, as if in apology for their want of manners at table:

"Riding since early dawn sharpens the appetite, you know, fraulein. We soldiers get to have the

appetites of wolves ; and perhaps sometimes act the same way. But all the same we are not boors or barbarians, as those English would make us out. And as our colonel may be here at any time we would finish before his arrival."

That reminded Tom of something. He had meant to look up Uncle Alvin, who must be wondering greatly what had become of them both. As the soldiers had scattered through the town, the fact of their presence must have gone everywhere. Even in the hospital, over which the flag of the Red Cross floated, the nurses were undoubtedly talking over the invasion.

"Let us go to uncle, Lucille," he remarked, as they came together. "He will be anxious about us, I'm afraid."

"Then tell the captain where we are going, and that if he wants us to do anything more he will find us at the hospital," said Lucille.

There was evidently no objection on the officer's part to their taking their departure. He gave them each a nod, and a supposedly friendly smile, but was too industriously engaged just then to do more.

As they were coming out they saw that a Uhlan was standing guard over the stairs leading to the upper part of the inn. Evidently the captain did not mean to take any chances of having that aroused Amazon descend upon him while he was enjoying his dinner.

Once over at the hospital they quickly came to where Uncle Alvin sat in a big chair. He did indeed look worried, though his face cleared magically at sight of his two wards. Uncle Alvin had actually picked up some flesh since coming here. His arm was getting on fairly well, too, and if given another week or so he might have issued forth from the hospital all the better from his long rest.

"I am glad you've come, children," he hastily told them. "All sorts of reports have been brought in about some Uhlans who are overrunning the town. I hope they do not put a match to this building, though I am thankful that I could walk out if it came to necessity. Now tell me all that has happened."

This was done as hastily as possible. The old gentleman seemed deeply interested concerning all he heard, especially in connection with the peril of the baronet.

"Why," he remarked, after he had heard the name of the Englishman, "I wonder now if that could be the famous Sir Archibald Featherstone, who has made such a name for himself as an explorer of ancient tombs and buried cities. A most wonderful man, all accounts agree. I have read many of his treatises myself."

"Well," Tom told him, "of course we don't know about all that, Uncle; only from what we've seen of him we think he must be above the common. The

coolest customer I ever struck, too. Right now he's sitting there, with one knee over the other, smoking his old black pipe as calmly as though only waiting for the dinner horn to blow. And yet they may shoot him inside of an hour."

"If he has the genius you say, Uncle," added Lucille, "then he's got the most wonderfully pushing wife any man ever had. She's the engine that speeds him forward, I tell you. Just wait till you meet her, that's all."

"I'm in no hurry, my dear," said the little old bachelor, who had managed to shun womankind pretty much all his life; "but something should be done to keep Sir Archibald from being injured. Tom, it seems to be up to you to think of a plan."

"I have fixed that in my mind already, Uncle," replied the boy.

"And what is the scheme, then?" questioned the other, eagerly.

"Oh!" Tom replied, "when the commanding officer comes to town Lucille and myself will have to interview him. I only hope he can speak and understand English, that's all."

"Yes," added his sister, "so far no one has seemed to bother searching Sir Archibald's pockets. If they had they would have found that document authorizing him to act as the representative of a London newspaper. And Tom says war correspondents must be treated as gentlemen, not dogs."

“Well, they seem to be getting a mighty small portion of respect in this war,” the old gentleman chuckled. “As far as I’ve heard they’ve been chased to the rear, and see next to nothing about what is going on. But, Tom, you see that this colonel, when he comes, reads that paper. It would be a burning shame if the wonderful Sir Archibald were shot as a common spy.”

“Then perhaps we’d better be going right away, Uncle,” suggested Tom, who was really eager to be outdoors, where things were happening all the time.

“Don’t linger on my account,” Uncle Alvin told them. “The doctor will be here in a short while, and perhaps he may tell me I can step out on the porch to sit in the afternoon sunshine. I believe it would do me some good. Hurry away, now, dears, on your errand of mercy.”

Accordingly Tom and his sister left the room, to seek the open air. Hardly had they gained the front of the hospital than both of them made a discovery that gave them a new thrill.

CHAPTER XVI

FRIENDS AT COURT

"WE'RE just in time, sis, for there they come along the road!" declared Tom, as he pointed toward another great cloud of dust.

"I can see Uhlans riding at the head, but there must be a lot of them to make all that dust," Lucille remarked.

"Listen, and you'll hear men shouting," said Tom. "I think they must be urging tired horses on. Perhaps they have a lot of artillery back of them, for it seems to me I can catch the rumble of wheels over the wooden bridge that spans the little stream over there."

Standing on the porch of the hospital they had a splendid view of what was going on. As the van of the mounted force struck the border of the town they settled down to a slower advance, so that the dust cloud was gradually dissipated.

"Yes, you guessed it, Tom, for now I can get glimpses of the guns," Lucille observed.

"And let me tell you they don't mean to stop here, judging from the way the artillery seems to be turning aside over that other road. There, you can see the officer in charge pointing up at the hills.

That's where the cannon are going before those tired horses have a rest."

The coming force had indeed separated, just as Tom said. Although the cavalrymen kept on into the town proper, the battery of field guns followed the road leading to the hills.

"They know every crossroad and bridle path in Northern France, I do believe," muttered Tom, with admiration plainly expressed in his manner. "They say that every German officer has studied the lay of the land between the frontier and Paris, year in and year out, until he is as familiar with it as with his native land."

"Look at the poor horses, how they strain and tug!" commented Lucille.

Indeed, the animals were covered with sweat and dust, so that they presented an appearance far from pleasant. But under the sting of the lash they were forced to put forth continual exertions.

The advent of the Uhlans, together with the passing of the artillery, was so far the most thrilling experience that had come to the stranded tourists. They continued to stand on the hospital porch and watch, until the shouting of the artillerymen and the rumble of the gun carriages grew less distinct, as they neared the base of the hills.

Then Tom and his sister remembered that they had something else to do besides act as sight-seers.

"Shall we go over to the inn now?" Tom asked.

"The new cavalrymen seem to be scattering around town just as the others did," Lucille returned. "I suppose they want to be fed the first thing and know just how to go about it."

"Well, they ought to," the boy told her, "because it's their business to raid in a hostile country, and they make it a point to live on the land. These Uhlans seldom carry anything to eat with them, I understand. It's a case of hard riding; to-day they are here, and to-morrow thirty miles away."

"Do you see any one like the colonel, Tom?"

"Well, there's a group of officers riding slowly up to the inn right now," was the reply; "and I suppose that man with the heavy beard must be the head of the detachment."

"Yes," continued Lucille, "because the others seem to wait on him and when he waves his hand some one gallops off as if he'd had his orders."

They walked towards the inn, and were conscious of the fact that several of the newcomers were eyeing them curiously. So far as Tom had seen there had up to then been no cases of vandalism; certainly they saw no ascending smoke to tell of burning houses, nor had a single shot been fired.

"There's Sir Archibald," remarked the girl, as they passed on.

Tom waved his hand, boy-fashion, toward the little baronet. His salute must have been seen, for

Sir Archibald immediately returned it, which action caused several mounted Germans to talk among themselves, as well as bend suspicious looks upon the young people.

As if wholly unconcerned Tom led his sister across the open square, and in this way reached the inn. Outside were a dozen dusty horses, looking as if they had come a long way since sunrise. One Uhlan sat in his saddle guarding the mounts.

"This must be the beginning of the end that the poor landlord told us he expected was going to overtake him," Lucille ventured, as they ascended to the porch.

Inside the inn could be heard gruff voices and heavy laughter. No doubt the balance of the officers were seating themselves at the table where the captain still sat, and hurling all manner of orders at the head of the trembling proprietor, to whom they must have appeared in the guise of so many ravenous wolves.

"I'm wondering how we'll fare after it's all over," muttered Tom, making a face. "These Germans have enormous appetites, and they'll clean us out of house and home. When they say good-by to this town it'll be a sorry looking place so far as getting a decent meal goes."

"But we shouldn't complain, remember, Tom," cautioned his sister.

"I know it," he admitted; "we've got so much to

be thankful for that we ought to stand little things like going hungry without grumbling."

"Those poor tired horses," Lucille continued, as her thoughts reverted to the way the artillerymen had lashed their animals; "how I pity them. Do you really believe they'll have to drag those heavy guns and caissons up to the top of that highest ridge over there?"

"You bet they will!" declared Tom. "From what little snatches of talk I've caught, and the way the men pointed, I'm sure that's what the Germans aim to do. They've got everything fixed up there for a regular siege — trenches, gun emplacements and all such things. Didn't you hear Sir Archibald say he knew it, and had seen some of the places with his own eyes?"

"If that is so, Tom, what is going to happen to this little town?" Lucille asked, in a quavering voice.

The picture as they saw it in the sunlight was so peaceful and pleasant it seemed hard to realize that a terrible change was imminent.

"Don't ask me that," he protested, with a frown; "I only hope we manage to clear out of this before the fighting starts. When both sides begin to bombard, with the town lying between, it's good-bye to nearly everything."

"Will you wait to see the colonel when he has finished eating, Tom?" she next asked.

"They say that's the best time to tackle a man if you want him to do you a favor," Tom suggested.

His sister laughed.

"Yes, I always used to notice, Tom, at home, when you'd been doing something you expected to be punished for, and had to confess to father, you always waited until he had gone into the library after dinner, and then slipped in behind him. I guess you do know the best way, so we'll wait for the colonel to finish."

They waited for half an hour, watching various things. A number of the Uhlans were rounding up some chickens in several yards not far away, though offering to pay for those they speared. Needless to say the polite and diplomatic owners seldom ventured to accept the proffered coins. Better to mourn the loss of a few fowls than take the chance of incurring ill-will.

Finally there was heard a great scraping of chairs inside the inn, after which the captain whom they had met before, accompanied by the man with the shaggy beard, and other officers, came out.

Tom had made up his mind that this was no time for delaying matters. Doubtless over their dinner, and the wine that flowed like water, the German officers had been discussing the affair of the suspected spy. Uhlans were notorious for giving men who had incurred their dislike, or who were believed to be traitors, a short shrift.

As Tom, followed by his sister, approached the group, now lighting cigars that of course the obliging innkeeper had produced, the colonel had his attention directed toward them by the captain.

He immediately beckoned, as though he wished them to join the group, an invitation which Tom and Lucille gladly obeyed.

"So, you are Americans, I hear?" observed the colonel.

Tom was pleased when he discovered that like the other German, the leader of the raiding detachment could also converse in English. He might hate the people of the "tight little island" across the Channel, but as an officer in the German army he had been obliged to learn the language.

"Yes, Colonel, we are Americans, caught here in a trap, and unable to get away up to now," the boy replied.

"My captain has told me about you," the bearded officer continued, pleasantly.

His manner showed that looks do not always tell the truth, for he appeared to be a very domineering man—as perhaps he was when ordering his troopers about.

"Then you know how we come to be caught here and that as soon as our uncle is strong enough to travel we expect to get away?" Tom continued, at which the colonel nodded again, and remarked:

"You could not fix the date of your departure

any too soon, for it is a matter of hours rather than days when this peaceful little valley will be filled with the roaring of countless guns, and the charging of thousands of troops. Take my advice, and get away without delay."

"It is very kind of you to say that, Colonel," returned Tom, "and when we get back home again be sure we mean to tell how we received nothing but friendly advice and assistance from the Uhlans."

"You cannot spread that intelligence too far to suit us," declared the colonel, with a snap of his square jaws, and a glitter in his blue eyes. "We are given a hard name by those who cannot understand what war means, and how men must deal harshly with people who try to fire into their backs. What can I do for you further, young folks?" (See Note 6).

Tom considered that this was a favorable time for him to put in a plea for the prisoner.

"We want to ask a favor of you, Colonel, but it is not for ourselves," Lucille broke in, before Tom could open his mouth to make the same remark.

Lucille's cheeks were burning, and she looked very pretty as she faced the big German officer. He smiled at her. Tom hoped he had a lot of daughters with just such red cheeks at his far-away home; and that Lucille with her pleading eyes reminded him of them.

"Tell me what it is, then, madchen," said the cavalryman, softly, "and perhaps I may be able to grant it."

"We have a friend who is in trouble," Lucille went on hurriedly, taking the reins out of her brother's hands, though Tom made no objection. "Our friend, the captain here, believes he is some sort of a spy, but we assure you it is impossible. He is a famous explorer of ancient tombs and catacombs and pyramids, my uncle says."

The German commander frowned, and stroked his beard.

"You mean the English baronet, Sir Archibald, do you not?" he asked gruffly.

"Yes, it was thought that he resembled some person who was suspected of being a spy," Tom managed to break in, determined that Lucille should not have all the glory. "But, Colonel, I do not think he has been searched yet. On his person you will find a paper showing that he is only a war correspondent. My uncle says that newspaper reporters are non-combatants, and should be treated with every courtesy by both sides, because they sway public opinion."

At that the officer burst into a laugh.

"So that is what Sir Archibald claims to be, is it?" he remarked. "We shall soon see, for the first thing we do will be to have his pockets turned

inside out, and the lining of his coat examined to learn whether he has any concealed papers. You shall come with us to observe the proceedings."

Of course this was as much as Tom and his sister could have expected. They gladly accompanied the group of officers to where the three guards stood around the prisoner.

Sir Archibald stood up. He was still smoking calmly, and appeared to be the most disinterested one present. Glancing over to the inn Tom could see that the lady in the case was still leaning out of her window, apparently a deeply interested spectator of all that was going on.

"Search him!" ordered the colonel, sharply, in German.

From the earnest and complete way in which they went about their task, the soldiers must have had ample experience in looking through the pockets of suspected persons. The colonel took possession of everything that was produced. Then he had them hand him Sir Archibald's coat, which he examined inch by inch.

When Tom and his sister saw him finally pick up the paper that meant so much to the prisoner, they almost held their breath. It was a toss-up just then whether Sir Archibald would be set free, or ordered to be shot as a suspected spy. Still, he puffed away as unconcerned as though he had no doubt concerning the eventual outcome of the affair. And if

this was assumed assurance Tom was ready to declare that he had never seen anything so well acted.

After reading the paper all through the officer observed Sir Archibald keenly. Tom fancied he was making use of his own powers of discernment in order to decide whether the accused man were guilty or innocent.

Just then the shrill voice of the lady made itself heard. The colonel glanced toward the inn, to see her waving both hands violently toward them, while she went on to threaten all sorts of vengeance from the British Government if even a hair of Sir Archibald's head were harmed.

"How is this, and who is the lady?" he asked the captain, evidently surprised.

"She is his wife, Colonel; we had to force her to retreat to her room. I was afraid she might even threaten to attack my whole command," the other assured him gravely, but possibly with a twinkle in his eye.

The colonel nodded his head, and then turned to the guards.

"Give the Herr Professor his coat and then let him go free," he ordered in English. "If he is only a poor newspaper correspondent he is harmless. Besides, there are some kinds of punishment in this world, I think, that are even worse than being shot."

Sir Archibald may have understood what lay be-

neath this remark, but at any rate he was wise enough not to aggravate matters by trying to defend his loud-voiced wife.

The colonel had been observing the little man with an air of amusement. Being of so large a build himself, doubtless he looked upon the other much as a mastiff might a terrier.

"I fancy that you may be a man whose word is to be believed, even if you are English," he proceeded to say, presently. "One question before I turn you free. Have you ever played the rôle of a spy since this war commenced?"

Sir Archibald knocked the ashes from his pipe. Then he carefully deposited this precious article in its particular pocket of his coat, after which he looked up steadily into the face of the Uhlan and replied:

"Never, in all my life, I assure you, Colonel!"

"That's enough; I believe you're the kind who would have owned up rather than tell a lie, even if you had to be shot for it. You are free to go your way, Sir Archibald, but let me give you a piece of advice first."

"That's jolly good of you, old chap; and I'll be pleased to hear it," the Englishman told him.

"Inform your people across the Channel that Germans are not barbarians. That is all. Captain, order our men to horse. It is time we were away!"

CHAPTER XVII

BETWEEN HOSTILE FORCES

TWENTY-FOUR hours later there had been no particular change in and around the town where Tom, Lucille and Uncle Alvin had found a refuge at the time of the outbreak of the dreadful war.

They had heard strange sounds, it is true, at intervals during the night and Tom declared it his opinion that many heavy guns must have passed close by between sunset and dawn.

Still, so far as general appearances went the town lay basking peacefully in the warm summer sunshine, with no soldiers in sight.

Tom wondered whether this could be in the nature of the lull that often precedes the breaking of the most violent storms. He was well versed in woodcraft, and capable of applying its principles to everyday life.

Several times they had looked through an old marine glass which the doctor at the hospital had produced. It was in the direction of the crest of those hills that their interest was centered. Every time they took this observation it was the same.

"Men are working feverishly up there," Tom had said to Lucille, "and they seem to be digging, dig-

ging all the time. They are German soldiers, too, because you can make out the gray uniforms, even if they are pretty well soiled by now, after all the fighting and marching they have done." (See Note 7.)

"Then Sir Archibald was right, Tom, and they mean to hold the hills against the French?" Lucille questioned.

"Yes, there's no doubt about it," he replied.

"The people in the town must know what is bound to happen," observed Lucille, "for everywhere you can see them trying to prepare for the worst. Poor things, I'm sorry for them. Some are burying valuables in their gardens while others have tried to leave town with a few things in an old cart drawn by a donkey, or a weak looking horse."

"Yes, and I saw some even loaded down themselves with all sorts of truck," added Tom. "As you say, it's terrible to think of all the suffering war causes. Up to now we've seen only the beginning of the bad times ahead for these folks; the worst is yet to come, when the fighting commences."

"Will they respect the hospital, do you think, Tom?"

"I give it up. It flies the Red Cross flag, to be sure, and I don't believe either the Germans or the French would willfully fire at it; but you know mistakes can happen. And it may be in the direct line of fire, just as churches are, often enough. If this

town is going to be fought over day after day, there may not be one stone left on top of another in the end."

"That's a dreadful thing to say, Tom," Lucille told him, with a look of positive pain on her young face; "but as soon as we've had some lunch, what's to hinder us from taking our last little stroll around here? We needn't go far and if as we plan we try to get away from the town to-night after the sun goes down, it'll be to say good-by forever to this pretty little valley."

"I don't know that there's anything to keep us from doing that," Tom replied. "So far we haven't seen a single sign of the French, and I guess from that the fighting will hardly begin here to-day."

"But it's going on all around us, you know," Lucille observed.

"Well, there's heavy firing along the line," Tom confessed; "and uncle says it's likely the Allies have started to attack the new positions of the Germans bordering the Aisne River."

Just then they heard the welcome call to luncheon. If the table was not quite so bountifully spread as on other occasions they made no complaint.

"After seeing what tremendous appetites those officers had yesterday," Lucille told her brother, "the only thing that surprises me is how our landlord managed to save anything at all."

"Just one more meal here, and then we'll be off."

"Uncle has already settled his bill in full, he told me," the girl continued. "He always wants to make sure that no one suffers through him. That Uhlan colonel was kind to warn us not to stay here any longer, I think."

"Yes, and I'd have said skip out last night, only for uncle. He complained of having eaten something that made him feel bad, and I didn't have the heart to tell him what the German commander told us. But we dare not stay any longer."

"Besides," added Lucille, laughingly, "the innkeeper has notified us that he means to shut up his house after to-day, so you see we couldn't stay any longer."

"But of course the hospital will keep open," returned Tom, "because it will soon be crowded with patients, if things turn out as they promise."

"I was asking Doctor Jacques," continued Lucille, more gravely, "and he said he was making ready to attend an unlimited number of cases at any time, now. His old chief will be back again, and the German guns up above are expected to provide the patients."

Sir Archibald and his wife soon joined them at the table. Lucille thought the usually boisterous lady acted as though somewhat subdued. Perhaps the consciousness that momentous events were impending had had some such influence on her nature.

As for the baronet, he seemed to be perfectly contented with the way the world was treating him.

"I admit that at first I was tempted to complain that I was being badly hit, when we found ourselves trapped in this beastly country," he told Tom and Lucille as they partook of the meal, "but since then my opinions have changed. I am satisfied that an ambitious war correspondent could hardly wish a better position for observing a battle than directly between the lines."

"But there will be danger," objected Lucille, having in mind all that Tom had said concerning the way the shells would burst over the devoted town, and the shrapnel fill the air with whining death.

"My word! where can you go these days, and be free from it?" he told her, with a whimsical smile. "Even in the streets of London I saw a poor chap run down by a bally motor cab, and they carried him away to the hospital to die. I am enough of a fatalist to believe I shall not give up the ghost until my time comes."

The meal was enlivened by anecdotes of Sir Archibald's former experiences, when he had risked every sort of peril in the pursuit of the calling that had been the passion of his earlier years. But it was mostly his wife who mentioned these things, for Sir Archibald declared that they were hardly worth talking about.

"Shall we take that last little walk around,

Tom?" asked Lucille, after they had left the dining-room, and stood once more on the veranda.

Before answering Tom looked carefully around. He evidently wished to make sure that there had been no change in the situation since his last survey.

"I don't see any objection," he finally observed, "if only we keep away from those further hills, where we happen to know the Germans are working on their trenches. Sir Archibald declares they use cement to build them, and that when finished they are the most complete things he ever saw, with places for sleeping and eating, as well as platforms from which to fire."

"I can see that you'd like to inspect one, Tom, but I hope you will never get the chance. I've seen about all of the Germans I care to. You know I've always had a leaning for our father's people, who were of French descent. To me all Germans are next to boors, because I don't understand them. But if you're ready, let's start out."

Not a cloud seemed to be in the heavens when they left the inn, expecting to cover a certain stretch of ground which had become very familiar to them during the days of their stay. Nor could they dream of the strange happenings that were to be their portion before they again came in contact with that same vine-covered hospital building, toward which they cast a glance as they strolled away.

As they walked they talked of many things — their far distant home, the prospect of getting back to Paris, the possibility that their absent young friends in Belgium, Austria and Germany might also be having serious troubles, and last but far from least the amusing doings of the strangely assorted couple whose acquaintance they had made under such remarkable conditions.

“Perhaps we have gone far enough,” suggested Lucille, after half an hour had elapsed.

They were on the edge of a wood that extended over the first rise. Beyond this the second and superior ridge stood out against the sky line, high enough to afford a splendid base for any army desirous of remaining on the defensive.

“I wanted to go as far as that cool little spring we know about, and that’s why I brought this tin cup along,” Tom remonstrated; “but if you’re feeling tired and would like to rest a little, suppose you sit down here and wait for me.”

“Just as you say, Tom, if only you promise to bring me a cup of the spring water. I can watch you go along to where it gushes from under those white rocks. Every time you look back I’ll wave my handkerchief, and ask you a question, which you might answer, if you feel like it. Trot along now; I’ll be good and rested for the return trip when you come back.”

“You promise not to move away from here,

where I can see you?" he asked, a little hesitation showing in his words and manner.

She laughed at him then.

"Not if I know what I want, and I think I do. Don't you dare upset that cup on the path up here, or perhaps I'll send you back again for more."

So Tom started off. He was whistling to himself as he went along. What if away up there on the heights those wonderful Germans had built themselves a fortified line from which they meant to defy the Allies? What if the French were slowly coming up, and must soon reach the point where they would be able to open on the line of hills with their big guns? That was something indefinite, and in the future. The present looked calm and serene; why should a fellow get lines across his forehead by taking on unnecessary worry?

So Tom told himself as he went along. He looked back twice as he covered the ground lying between the woods and the crystal spring. Each time Lucille kept her word, and waved to him. He read the words she spelled out and even sent back an answer.

After that he did not think to look back until he was very near the spring, and then upon turning he saw that she was waving her handkerchief furiously. Something in the manner in which she did this struck a note of dismay to the boy's heart.

Standing there, and shutting his teeth grimly as he steadied his nerves against a shock, Tom Mailard translated every flourish of that swiftly-moving white handkerchief until he had made out the whole message. It read as follows:

“Take care — men creeping up on you — don’t try to run, Tom!”

He had just succeeded in making out that last word, and was still shivering with the anxiety he had felt concerning Lucille, when a gruff voice called out something in French, and, wheeling, Tom found himself covered by several rifles gripped in the hands of men who wore baggy red trousers — French soldiers of the line!

CHAPTER XVIII

A PRISONER OF WAR

FORTUNATELY Tom did not lose his head. He knew that if he made any sort of hostile move one of those fierce looking fellows in the red trousers, and with the knapsacks on their backs, might press a finger on a trigger.

Some instinct it must have been that caused the boy to immediately elevate both his hands as high as he could get them. Tom had never been held up before, except possibly by some of his comrades in a snowball fight, but he knew that this attitude was accepted the world over as a signal of surrender.

"Hey! hold on there, don't shoot!" he called out.

Perhaps they understood his words, and then again it might be otherwise; but his actions could not be misconstrued. So the men in the baggy red trousers advanced, still covering him with their guns.

"Must take me for a pretty dangerous sort," Tom told himself, when he saw how careful they were not to let him go unguarded for even a second.

Two of them laid their guns down, and advanced. In another minute they had laid rough hands on the lad, and he found his arms whipped behind his back,

where they were immediately fastened together at the wrists with an old piece of rope.

There was more or less chattering going on while this operation was being carried out. Tom listened, and tried the best he knew how to grasp the meaning of what his captors were saying.

"Now this is mighty queer," he told himself, when he found that the task seemed to be beyond him; "why should they think I'm such a dangerous chap when those Germans didn't bother? Maybe I don't wish Lucille was here to tell me what in the dickens all this fuss is about."

Watching closer, he saw that they had taken his handkerchief, and were waving it, even as Lucille had been doing with hers just before his capture.

"Oh! now I know what it's all about!" exclaimed Tom, with a sickly little grin. "They must have seen us exchanging signals, and the silly geese believe that we were trying to let the Germans up on the hills know about the French being down here. But how am I going to tell them what it meant — that's what bothers me?"

Just then the non-commissioned officer in charge of the squad of French soldiers gave a sharp order. Immediately two of the men detached themselves from the rest and started off. Their manner was so suggestive that Tom felt a sudden cold feeling grip his heart.

"Oh! they have been sent out to capture the one

I was signaling to," he muttered. "Couldn't they see that it was only a girl? What if Lucille tries to run away when she sees them coming? Will they shoot at her?"

The very thought made Tom feel weak about the knees. He determined to try and explain matters to the fierce looking sergeant.

It was easy enough to attract the man's attention, but when it came to making him understand what he was saying Tom found himself up against a tough proposition.

In vain did he pour out a torrent of words, telling just who he was, and that it was only his sister with whom he was carrying on an innocent method of communication.

He kicked the tin cup with his toe as it lay on the ground near by, trying to explain that he was on his way to get a drink at the time, and meant to fetch the cup full of water back to his sister.

The sergeant may not have been a dense man, but he certainly failed to grasp anything that Tom was trying to tell him. He frowned, and shook his head, rattling off a lot of French that of course was just as incomprehensible to the boy as his English had been to the sergeant.

Then another of the soldiers was called up, a small wiry man, who may at some time or other have prided himself on being able to speak a little

English. Tom, not to be daunted, again went through his little speech. The soldier watched his face eagerly, and then nodded his head, after which he turned to his chief and gave vent to a volley of French.

Instead of mending matters it seemed to Tom this only made things worse. He saw the frown on the sergeant's wrinkled face grow more serious; the man certainly looked at him as though he were now positive he had caught a prize, the capture of which would put him in high favor among his superiors.

"It's no use," groaned Tom; "the more I try to explain the deeper I seem to get stuck in the mud. The only hope I can see is that they fetch sis here right away. She can talk French, and will straighten things out in a jiffy."

He hugged that hope to his heart, but only for a brief time. Then he saw that the men seemed about to move away.

"Why, they don't act as though they meant to stay here till the others get back with sis!" he muttered, in dismay, "and I suppose they'll be taking me off with them, too! Well, all I can hope is, that sooner or later we run across a man who *can* speak English; or else some British soldier. I believe these sillies take me for a German spy!"

He did not know what to do; indeed, since he

was completely in the power of the French soldiers, Tom realized that he had no chance to do anything, except what they ordered him.

"Anyway," he resolved, "I'll try to put on a smiling face, and not look as though I'd lost my last friend. It's all going to come out right, some way, that's sure. But if only I knew Lucille was safe I'd feel a heap easier. Oh! yes, I'm coming, so don't prod me with that bayonet. You've got me in a bad fix, and I don't like it a bit."

With the men around him, Tom was compelled to march away. He could not of course tell where they were taking him, but hoped it would be to the main body of troops. That seemed to be his reliance, for surely there must be many among the French who could understand what he had been trying so hard to explain to this slow-witted sergeant.

"I wonder if I'll see that wonderful General Joffre again," he asked himself, as memory carried him back to that day when on the boulevard of Paris he had stood so close to the grim warrior whom the crowd had delighted to honor, and with whom their friend, Monsieur Armand, seemed to be acquainted.

Before long Tom made a discovery. Over yonder was an odd mound of earth, he thought. It was apparently freshly made, too, and from this he guessed it must mark the position of some French

gun that was being trained on the German entrenchments only a few miles distant.

Yes, as they drew somewhat closer Tom could see men moving about, and then he even glimpsed a long gray object that gleamed in the sun's rays like steel.

"They are getting ready to open fire on the Germans," he told himself. "Yes, all along I can see other mounds like that, and behind them men hurrying about, with horses galloping like mad. It's coming soon; and I'm afraid we've waited just one day too long."

Now they came to a regiment of French soldiers. They were lying down on the bare earth and seemed to be resting after a long march. Perhaps the men in whose charge Tom found himself belonged to this regiment; at least they were greeted with all manner of exclamations, and were kept busy making replies as they pushed on.

Tom made a discovery that did not please him. He noticed that after his captors had called out something the men around scowled blackly at him; some even made suggestive gestures, as if to signify that hanging would be too good for him.

"That's the worst of not knowing how to defend yourself," grumbled the boy as he saw these hostile demonstrations. "I bet you now they're telling all sorts of yarns about what I was caught doing, just

to make it seem a bigger thing that they captured me."

In vain he looked to right and left in the hope of descrying one friendly face.

"Is there any one here who can talk English?" he started to say, when a rough hand was clapped over his mouth, and he was given to understand that a prisoner of war must not utter a single word unless asked a question.

Tom was half-tempted to insist on calling out; but common sense told him he would surely be injured by these men if he went against orders.

"They all believe I was trying to betray their position to the Germans," he thought, "and that's what makes them look at me as they do. What part of France can they come from, not to know English? If I could only tell them I'm an American boy, and that it was only my sister who was waving to me! But it's no use; they are determined not to let me say a single word."

He was hustled through the regiment, and soon found himself beyond the trenches. They were being hastily dug by an army of eager men, the deep ditch being partly covered over on top, so as to afford a protection against the hail of shrapnel that would presently be strewn far and wide by the German field guns on the hills.

And now a new fear began to grip Tom's heart. He wondered if these grim soldiers could be intend-

ing to take him to the rear to execute him! The thought gave the boy a chill. He tried to laugh it off, but somehow he could not.

“Oh! they wouldn’t do such a thing as that,” he told himself. “This is war, and soldiers do all sorts of terrible things when in the heat of battle; but Frenchmen would never be guilty of shooting a boy without giving him at least a chance to tell his story.”

Tom had read about the military tribunal organized on the field in order to try an accused person. He knew that always this “drum-head” court was composed of officers.

“They’ll have sense, at least, and be able to talk with me,” he concluded, with a sigh; “only I wish things would hurry along. I’m worried about sis, too. I wish I knew it was all right with her. Hello! what are they going to do with me now, I wonder?”

They had come to a halt before a house that seemed to be above the ordinary. Tom had never chanced to wander in this direction before, and therefore had not set eyes on the building up to then; but he could see it was a mansion belonging to some one of considerable means.

Just then it was apparently deserted. The owner may have fled when the war broke out, or having to join the colors he might have sent his family south, and shut up the house.

It seemed as though the French soldiers had broken into the building, and that it was being used as a sort of headquarters for the regiment nearby; perhaps as a military prison besides.

At any rate Tom was led through the open doorway, and was presently ushered into a room, where he saw that the heavy outside shutters were closed, and probably nailed tight.

His captors said something to him, which of course he could not understand; after which they cut the fragment of rope that bound his hands, and shoving him back, closed the door. Tom heard a sentry walking up and down outside, and knew that he was to remain a prisoner for an indefinite time.

He sank to the floor, and tried to consider what his next best move should be, and whether it might be wise in him to attempt escape, if the chance offered. Only for his dread concerning Lucille he would have settled upon what course to pursue. While her fate was unknown he did not dare try to flee, lest by this course he should be deserting the one whom he was bound to defend.

It was some time later, and Tom still sat there, pondering on his wretched condition, when without warning a terrible concussion made the building tremble as if an earthquake had occurred. He knew from that the bombardment of the German positions on the hills had commenced.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LITTLE COMFORTER

"OF all the tough luck, this takes the cake," Tom told himself, as crash followed crash, while the house shook as though threatening to come down. "Here's a regular artillery duel going on all around me, and a fellow can't see a single thing. When you've got the name you like to have the game, too. I wonder if I could find a peep-hole anywhere."

Spurred by curiosity, and a desire to see what a real battle was like, Tom visited every window in the room. He glued his eye to each crack at which daylight struggled in, but his success was far from satisfying.

"Hang it! I can't glimpse anything except a lot of smoke!" he exclaimed in sheer disgust, as he gave up the attempt.

If anything the concussions seemed to increase in volume. They came from either side, and for lack of anything else to make the minutes pass without dragging, Tom finally tried to place each discharge.

"My! but they're spoiling a heap of powder," he remarked. "I wonder what it stands for up

there on the hills, where the Kaiser's army is hiding back of their trenches. If the Germans are banging away ditto, it must be pretty warm outside. I wish I knew about that!"

This gave him a new occupation. By listening steadily he was soon able to hear faraway booming; though whether French or German guns caused this Tom of course was not in a position to decide.

"But what's that queer sound like the rattle of hail on the roof?" he asked himself, between two furious outbursts of cannonading. "I wonder if that could be the shrapnel I've heard so much about? They send it with a fuse that allows the shell to burst in the air just in front of the trenches or lines of crouching troops; and the force of the explosion sends hundreds of little bullets darting downward for dozens of yards."

Many times did he hear this strange pattering sound; and from this Tom judged that the foe on the elevation must be replying to the bombardment of the Allies, gun for gun.

One hour — two, passed.

Tom began to wonder how long this thing was going to keep up. Somehow among other matters of interest that kept coming into his mind, he thought of that exposed French town in the valley, with the rival armies on either side, and a storm of shot and shell passing back and forth continuously.

"I'm afraid it'll be as Uncle Alvin said," Tom observed aloud, regretfully; "and even the Red Cross floating from the hospital won't save it from random shells. If any of the French soldiers hide behind the houses of the town the Germans will claim they had a right to smash the walls down, so as to uncover the snipers. It's just awful, that's what war is!"

Tom had many things to worry him just then. There was Lucille for one; then Uncle Alvin, left in the hospital, which might even then be crumbling in ruins; and as if these were not enough he allowed his thoughts to fly far afield to Belgium, in which country he knew those good friends of his, Mart and Harvey Dorr, had been visiting at the time the war cloud burst so suddenly.

Somehow this last caused Tom to give a queer little chuckle.

"I've been picturing poor Harvey," he burst out with, "shut up in a damp Belgian dungeon, just on account of his taking pictures that were forbidden; and say, here I am a prisoner of war, held by our friends, the French, my father's own people, and even suspected of being a German spy! Well, this is the limit!"

There was a rattling sound at the door just then, and Tom whirled around. Perhaps a fear clutched at the boy's heart that his rough captors might be coming to lead him out to execution. He set his

teeth hard together, and drew in a long breath, as though resolved that they would at least not hear a whimper from his lips.

As the door opened partly some one was thrust inside. Tom's heart gave a throb, for he believed he had glimpsed a familiar little figure.

"Lucille!" he exclaimed, in a state of suspense, lest his hopes had deceived him.

"Oh! Tom, is that you?" he heard her half-sob; and in another second brother and sister were together.

The girl had her little cry out on Tom's shoulder, while he soothed her the best way a clumsy boy could.

"It isn't that I've been hurt at all, Tom," she explained; "don't worry about that. But I'm so indignant, and so angry to think those foolish soldiers who made me come along with them wouldn't believe a word I told them. All they could say, with their bows and shrugs, was that they had been ordered to fetch me here. They even gave me to understand that I could tell my story to their colonel, or the marines, or somebody or other. But I'm so glad I've found you, Tom. Tell me, have you been hurt in any way?"

"Not at all, sis, only in my feelings," he assured her. "Just as you say, it's a horrible thing to feel that you're looked on as a spy, and by French soldiers, too, the very men we've always felt for,

because we've got French blood in our veins. But you must have seen something of the battle?"

He could feel her shudder.

"Yes, and it's just dreadful — dreadful," she told him. "Everywhere I looked I could see billows of smoke shooting out, as guns were fired. The noise was enough to deafen you; and oh! how wicked the flashes of fire seemed. And then, there were shells bursting and throwing the dirt as high as the treetops. Up in the air I could see any number of puffs of smoke that they told me came from shrapnel exploding."

"To think of all that going on, and I shut up here as blind as a mole, when I'd give heaps and heaps just to see it for once!" groaned Tom.

"And oh! Tom, I even saw men lying on the ground where they'd been thrown when they were struck!" Lucille continued, in a hushed voice. "Three different times we met men with red crosses on their sleeves. They were carrying stretchers, and on them were wounded soldiers. It was terrible! But, Tom, no matter how badly those brave fellows were injured, they laughed and called out and even waved their hands as though they thought all this the best of fun. One even kissed his hand to me."

"The French are a brave people," ventured Tom, with a touch of pride in his tone, "and they make good fighters."

"Oh! listen to that, Tom!"

"Yes, that shell must have burst pretty near this house," he replied, uneasily. "I hope they haven't started using this mansion as a range finder."

"What do you mean by that?" Lucille asked him.

"Why," explained Tom, "often when a battery wants to bombard the trenches of an enemy they look for some object that stands out plainly. Then a shell is fired, and through their glasses the officers determine just where the fuse causes it to burst. After that they can fix their shells so that they'll break just where they will be apt to do the most good. A church steeple is seen miles away, and makes the best kind of a range finder."

"You think, then, they can see this house away up there, and are using it as a target, so as to get the range for the trenches; is that it, Tom?"

"Seems like it," he replied; "but let's hope they're already satisfied with results, and will leave us alone. I don't suppose you know anything about the town, and whether it's being shelled?"

"I don't know," she told him, uneasily. "I looked back lots of times, and it seemed to me there was smoke above the place where I remembered it lay. The battle of the big guns is going on for miles and miles. As far away as I could see it was the same. The whole earth kept shaking with the awful noise."

"Poor uncle!" muttered Tom, before he knew what he was saying, and then he was sorry, for Lucille had caught his words.

"Do you think he will suffer, Tom?" she asked, with a sigh. "Surely both the Germans and the French will respect that noble symbol of the Red Cross that flies from the hospital. If uncle only stayed there he could escape all danger."

"I hope so," returned Tom, trying to put on a brave front; "and besides, if it does get too warm they can take their patients into the cellars. Let's make up our minds uncle will be all right. We've got enough to worry about ourselves, seems to me."

"Oh!" the girl exclaimed, eagerly, "when I get a chance to explain to some one who is a gentleman, and not just a clod-hopper of a boor from the farm, I can easily prove we are what we claim. At the worst it will only mean we may have to spend a night here, Tom. And we might be worse off."

Another terrific roar came close by, as a shell bursting caused Tom to jump.

"Yes," he remarked, with a nervous little laugh, "there *are* lots of worse places than inside this house, I guess. If any poor fellows were near that bomb when it scattered death around they found it so. And for one I mean to stop grumbling. When we look back later on we'll see how it was all for the best, like as not."

"That sounds more like you, Tom," his sister

told him, as she patted his hand lovingly, both being seated in an embrasure of one of the deep windows.

"What time do you think it is?" he asked, after another spell of listening had passed, with the dreadful roar outside not slackening a particle.

"Just before we got here," she told him, "I noticed that the sun was about two hours high above the ridge we could see, far off to the west."

"Well, as it sets around seven these summer days that would make it something like five or half-past right now," Tom asserted. "I hope they won't forget that we can get hungry, even if we are prisoners of war."

"I couldn't eat a bite if I was paid for it, I feel so terribly about uncle, and those poor women and children in that town over there," said Lucille, who had a gentle heart.

"Oh! well, I suppose boys are different," her brother observed, as though he considered some sort of apology necessary. "It's got to be something mighty severe that takes away my appetite, let me tell you. But just before they put you in here, I was wondering whether I could find any way of escaping."

"Would it be the right thing to do?" she asked him.

"But what business have they to hold Americans prisoners? We have a right to get away if the chance opens up," protested Tom, stubbornly.

“If we should, Tom, it will look as though we were guilty,” she told him, gravely. “And, then, besides, what if we were fired on? They might shoot you before we had a chance to explain things. Oh! let’s stay right here, and wait for them to take us before officers who can understand.”

“Perhaps you’re right,” admitted Tom, a bit unwillingly; “I’m only afraid that silly sergeant may make it seem a great deal worse than it is.”

“But why should he, Tom?”

“Oh! I don’t know, except that he wants to play hero, and have it look as though he’d made a wonderful capture. Two babes in the woods, more like, I say. Why, nothing could tempt a Maillard to betray France. I’d sooner cut my hand off than to think of such a thing.”

“Well, let’s believe it’s all going to come out right by to-morrow morning,” she continued, in her soothing way; and then shrank against Tom in a huddled heap, for there had come a frightful crash, accompanied by a quiver of the walls, and the sound of falling plaster and beams.

“There,” said Tom, with a gasp; “they’ve gone and done it at last, just as I told you. That was a shell, and it knocked a corner of the house to flinders, I guess!”

CHAPTER XX

THE LONG NIGHT

"Do you think the worst is over, Tom?" asked the girl.

"It is, so far as that shell goes," he replied, reassuringly, as he put his arm around her protectingly.

"But there may be others to come?" she continued, apprehensively.

"That's so; but let's hope not."

"They've got the range of this house," she told him.

"It looks like it, unless that was an accidental shot. Besides," Tom went on, "why should they want to waste ammunition on a single house, when they'd better be slamming a few of their old shells in the trenches where the French soldiers are hiding? I only hope they don't turn one of those awful howitzers we've heard so much about on us." (See Note 8.)

"They've been looking this way through their glasses, and have seen soldiers moving around here," Lucille suggested. "Perhaps they believe this house is being used as headquarters for the Allies' staff."

"Whew! I hope they don't get that silly notion into their heads," muttered Tom, "for they'd knock every wall to splinters. One thing I wish, which is that we could only find a way to get out of here."

The minutes dragged along. There was no cessation of the heavy cannonading, both near and far; but the prisoners of the deserted mansion were relieved that no second shell struck their shelter.

When an hour had passed Lucille ventured to voice her hopes.

"It looks now as if we might get through; don't you think so, Tom?" she asked.

"Must be getting close to quitting time," he admitted, cheerfully. "As a rule I believe they don't do much night firing, because they find it hard to keep the range, and it would be a waste of valuable ammunition."

"Tom, I do believe they're slackening right now!" cried Lucille, eagerly.

"Yes, since you mention it, seems as though there wasn't as much racket as we've been listening to. That terrible gun on our left hasn't gone off for quite a little while. I guess the circus is over until daybreak."

"Oh! I'm so glad!" sighed the girl.

"Shake hands on it, because it seems to me we've been playing in great luck after all. Lots of things might have happened that didn't, you know!"

"Tom, I've been looking around here while we had some daylight," Lucille told him, presently.

"Yes, and what of it?" he demanded.

"Why, in case they keep us shut up here all night, which looks likely, we could fix things so as to be fairly comfy, Tom."

"I warrant we can, if *you* have the management," he replied. "But keep on explaining. Do you mean that we might be able to coax them to give us some supper?"

"Oh! there you are again, thinking of eating," she scolded him; "though for your sake I do hope they will remember us with a bite or two. But I was thinking of how we might manage to sleep."

"Yes, that's right, we ought to have a few winks, of course," he agreed.

"There's an old sofa, or couch, in that corner that would do splendidly for one, Tom," the girl continued, as though keeping tally with her fingers as she mentioned the extent of her observations.

"Why, so there is, I do believe," said the boy; "though to tell you the truth I hadn't paid much attention to the contents of the room. I was thinking more about the chances of a shell dropping in on us; or how I could find a way to crawl out of the ruins if the house were smashed."

"Keep on and say that you were also worrying about whether you would have to go to bed with-

out your supper. I've known you to do that more than once at home, when you did something that father had forbidden. But besides the couch there's a sort of easy-chair in here that wouldn't make a bad place to sleep."

"I choose the chair, then," decided Tom. "You know I was always partial to going to sleep in one at home, after a hard day on the diamond, or playing hockey on the ice. You can have the couch and welcome."

"That's kind of you, Tom," she told him, patting his hand; "but listen; what can that be? Somebody is coming, I do believe!"

"Well, it's about supper-time, anyway," muttered the boy.

Presently the door opened, to admit several soldiers. One bore a lantern, which he set on the floor; while another had a tin dish of some sort, from which steam was rising.

"Bully for them!" exclaimed the delighted Tom; "they don't mean to starve us to death, anyhow. If I must drop off I'd rather have it over sudden. Give me a bursting shell every time, rather than slow torture from having nothing to eat."

Lucille tried to talk with the men. She wanted to coax them to take a message to their commander-in-chief, telling him that they were Americans, tourists who had been caught between the lines of the

hostile armies by hard luck, whose only desire was to get away from the fighting zone as soon as they could.

Evidently the three men had their orders, for none would reply. They shrugged their shoulders in French fashion, spread out the palms of their hands, as though to express their inability to assist her in any way, and departed.

Lucille was disappointed.

"I wonder if my French is so very bad, after all," she remarked, disconsolately, when they were again left to themselves.

"Oh! I wouldn't say that," Tom returned, to cheer her up somewhat. "Seems to me you rattle it off like a regular native. But soldiers have to obey orders, you know, and just as like as not those fellows were commanded not to speak a word."

Tom had already discovered that while the contents of the pan might not be of a very attractive order, it was warm food, and had a savory smell. Besides, as has been mentioned before, Tom was accustomed to camping out and was not at all particular when it came to eating. Quantity rather than quality served as his slogan, when he had what he called his "camp appetite" along.

After all there was a bit of fun in eating under such strange conditions, especially to a couple of adventurous youngsters like these. They even managed to joke a little while the rude camp fare van-

ished. Fortunately there seemed to be sufficient to satisfy both, when the pannikin had been emptied.

It was by this time almost quiet without. The furious firing had ceased, although once in a while, far away, they could hear some rumbling sound that might be a bridge or a building being blown up for strategical reasons.

No one came to break in upon their solitude, and feeling very tired after all the excitement of that eventful day, the prisoners finally decided to make themselves as comfortable as they could.

Lucille was lodged upon the couch, and Tom even found some sort of covering to spread over her.

"Luckily I always carry matches with me," he told Lucille, "which is one of the things a fellow who learns woodcraft and scouting picks up. So I'll just douse the glim here. If we should happen to want a light between now and morning I'll be in a fair way to get it."

It was indeed a long night, and one never to be forgotten. Tom slept by snatches. It seemed to him as though every hour he would awaken, when it became his habit to lift his head, listen attentively, and then, on finding that Lucille seemed to be sleeping soundly, change his cramped position, and drop off again.

Lucille had insisted that he draw the big grandfather chair over close to the couch. She wanted to know that he was there, for in this way she could

put out her hand and touch him, if she awoke during the night, and found herself nervous.

Morning came at last.

So little light struggled into the barricaded room that it must have been after sunrise before Tom, sitting up, saw Lucille looking at him.

"You were making the funniest sounds," she told him, "just as though you couldn't get your breath. I had to laugh at first, but was beginning to think I ought to shake you when open went your eyes."

"That's right," Tom remarked, with a dry chuckle; "I guess I must have been a little shy on wind, because you see I was making a record dive in a water tournament at home, and just came up when I woke. But there seems to be a lot of bustle going on outside."

"I've heard horses neighing, and the rumble of some heavy vehicles for quite a while now," Lucille told him.

"Then some more of the artillery of the Allies must have come up and I guess they're rushing the guns into position as fast as they can."

"That means more terrible firing than ever, doesn't it?" Lucille asked.

"Just what it does," was the reply. "The Germans have turned at bay over there, and it looks as if they didn't mean to retreat a rod further. The fight along this line may last a whole week, for all anybody can say."

"But battles never used to take that long when Napoleon and Grant led their armies, did they, Tom?"

"Of course not, but conditions have changed since those days," he explained to her, from his superior knowledge of such things. (See Note 9.)

Perhaps Tom might have been inclined to continue on the subject, to which he had really devoted considerable attention, only that just then the door opened, and the same three soldiers appeared.

When Tom discovered that one of them bore some breakfast for the prisoners, he very naturally lost all interest in abstract matters pertaining to ancient and modern wars. Other things much more important demanded his attention.

This time the three soldiers stood back, and seemed to be waiting for them to finish their meal. Tom noticed this fact and commented on it.

"I really believe they mean to take us somewhere when we're done," he told his sister, which information of course interested Lucille not a little.

"All I hope is," she announced, "that they lead us to some one in authority, who will listen to what I'm trying to explain. If I could only convince him that we're Americans, and neutrals in this horrid war, he might say we could go free. It's a burning shame that we should be treated this way."

"Sure it is," agreed Tom, "and you make it just as strong as you know how. Every time you look

at me I'll nod my head. We must pull together, and try to get out of this trap."

When they had finished eating one of the French soldiers bowed politely and addressing Lucille said:

"Pardon, ma'm'selle, but we have orders to take you both before our commanding officers. The sergeant will be there to tell why you were taken prisoners. So prepare to go with us."

"Tell him we'll be only too glad," cried Tom, when this had been translated by Lucille. At the same time he scrambled to his feet.

So they were led forth. The sun was well above the horizon, though the firing seemed to be only beginning in the distance. Tom was glad of this, for he could see all around him evidences to prove that considerable damage had been done by the rain of shells coming from the hills beyond.

Glancing back they discovered that one wing of the mansion lay in ruins, which in itself was mute evidence of the terrible power of those great German shells when they struck any object.

CHAPTER XXI

IN THE HEADQUARTERS TENT

"YES, we ought to be thankful," Lucille observed, and from this remark Tom knew that she too must have observed the wreck caused by that one shell.

"It would have smashed the main body of the house to pieces if it had struck there," declared Tom.

There were many other evidences of the previous afternoon's rain of shells, for here and there they could see fearful holes in the ground where explosions had occurred.

Soldiers were hurrying this way and that by scores. Evidently they were accomplishing all necessary changes before the firing opened, for that would make exposure along the trenches dangerous.

"Look, Tom," said the girl, suddenly, "isn't that a British Tommy standing over there, smoking his pipe?"

"It certainly must be," the boy replied, after a glance; "he's wearing khaki, and that's what none of the French do so far, you know. They're away behind the times in dress, though as brave as they can be. Somehow they fancy those blooming red trousers so much they won't discard 'em."

"But they say they can be seen five times as far away as the green gray of the Germans, or the khaki of the British," Lucille remarked.

"Oh! it was only during the Boer war that the British learned what we knew long before, over on our side of the water. They used to wear red coats, you remember. But those Boers with their long-range rifles taught them a lesson. Since then they've dressed differently."

"I'm glad to see we're being taken back from the trenches, Tom."

"That's so, which I reckon is because the Headquarters staff know better than to stick around where those German gunners can draw a bead on them. They'd glimpse the flag that always flies over Headquarters, miles away; and every gun within range would keep battering away at that point."

"I can see some tents off there," Lucille announced presently.

"Yes, and that extra big one must be where the commander-in-chief has his quarters."

"I only hope we'll find a sensible man there, who can understand my American accent," remarked Lucille, "and will see how silly it is to believe we could be connected with anything German, we Mailards."

Straight toward the large marquee tent their guards led them. A sentry stood at the entrance, and words passed between the newcomers and this

man. Then an officer came out, took a look at the prisoners, and told them in French to enter.

"He doesn't think we can be dangerous, anyhow," muttered Tom, "for he never said a word about those men keeping alongside."

Once inside the big tent they saw that it was indeed Headquarters for this division of the Allies. Several officers of high standing had evidently been engaged in serious discussion, for they had many maps and papers on the camp table at which they were sitting.

"Thunder! there's that grizzled old sergeant who captured me," whispered Tom; "I don't like his looks a bit. He wants to make out that he's done something worth getting the Legion of Honor for, and he looks dangerous when he eyes us."

The officers were looking them over. Evidently they were surprised to see such a young pair of spies brought before them. Perhaps from what the ambitious sergeant had said they expected to see something far different.

Tom noticed that some of them exchanged looks, and even nodded.

"I hope," he told himself, "that doesn't mean they're ready to believe the worst of us. I'm glad I've got those letters along with me, to prove we're what we claim. But a whole lot depends on Lucille; and I hope she can convince them we ought to be set free."

One of the officers addressed Lucille.

"We have been informed that you speak French, ma'm'selle; is it so?" he asked.

"I learned it in school over in America," she told him, modestly; "my pronunciation is faulty, I know, but I can understand it better than I can speak it."

"Then when this sergeant is told to explain just what the conditions were that resulted in the capture of your brother and yourself, you can follow what he says, can you not?"

"I will try to, *Monsieur le Colonel*," the girl told him, for she judged what his rank must be from his uniform.

"Please remember," continued the officer, more kindly it seemed to Tom, who could only guess what was said, "that you must not interrupt the proceedings on any account."

"I understand, monsieur," Lucille told him, simply.

"After he is through," the officer assured her, "you will be given a chance to explain; for we find it hard to believe that you can be the desperate enemies of France he states."

"We are Maillards!" Lucille said, with such a proud manner that it caused a glow to appear in the eyes of the soldier, who seemed to have taken the task of prosecutor upon himself.

After that he turned to the sergeant, and appar-

ently demanded that the latter tell what he knew about the matter. All of the officers fastened their attention on the man, who was more or less nervous, but evidently bent on making his part of the capture seem as brilliant as possible.

Tom could not understand what he said. He judged that the sergeant must be doing all in his power to make it appear black for the prisoners. Lucille gasped several times as though shocked at some insinuation that she knew to be absolutely without foundation. Tom even thought she was about to break in and interrupt the story, but apparently the girl remembered the warning she had received, for on each occasion she caught herself in time.

"What is he saying about us?" whispered Tom, when he could stand the suspense no longer.

"Oh! he is telling the most terrible lies," she whispered back. "The contemptible coward! He even says he believes he saw a German officer standing on a rock up on the side of the hill; who he thinks must have been receiving the messages we were sending in relays with our handkerchiefs."

That angered Tom more than anything else.

"To think that he is a Frenchman, too, and would even have us shot just to get a little glory out of it himself!" he muttered. "Well, all I hope is that a German shell wipes up the ground with him pretty

quick. France has no need of cowards of his make. He must have been changed in the cradle, and hasn't French blood in his veins at all."

About that time the sergeant finished his story. It had been brought out by numerous questions on the part of the prosecutor, who seemed to know just how to manage such a rough customer.

He now turned toward Lucille.

"You have heard the charge against you and your brother, ma'm'selle?" he asked, and the girl nodded her head in the affirmative. "Now we will listen to your story. Be as brief as you can, please, as our time is valuable. Tell us who you are, and why you are here at this particular time."

Lucille drew a long breath. The moment she had waited for was now at hand. Still it was hard to confine herself to bare facts when her whole body thrilled with indignation on account of the accusation which had been made against them.

She started in by telling how, with their uncle and a party of friends, they had crossed the Atlantic on a vacation tour. Then rapidly she sketched their leaving Paris, and their arrival at the little town where the sudden news that war had been declared by Germany on Russia had thrilled them.

The officers listened intently. The booming of big guns had again started, but they apparently did not notice the fact. All fixed their attention on the pretty, flushed face of Tom's sister, as she struggled

to find the proper French words to express what she wanted to tell.

Then came the sudden leaving of the patriotic Andre, and how Tom had to take the place of the missing chauffeur. After that the story led to the accident, when the hurrying French officers ran them down at night-time on the road. Last of all she told how they had been enabled to reach the town in the valley, where Uncle Alvin had been since confined to the hospital, while they had remained to watch over the old gentleman.

In conclusion she told how her brother Tom belonged to the Boy Scouts in America, and that he had taught her more or less of the signal code so that it was their habit to transmit little messages to one another when the chance arose.

"The only Germans we have ever seen over here," she told them, "were those Uhlans who entered the town, and made the innkeeper give them a dinner. And even if they were Uhlans they looked at our letters, and believed we were Americans, if our folks did come from France years and years ago. And that is everything I know."

Tom had kept his word, for several times when Lucille happened to look toward him he took it upon himself to nod his head vehemently, as if to back up her assertion, though likely enough he might be densely ignorant of what she had said.

He hoped her story had made a favorable im-

pression on the officers, one of whom at least he believed must be a general, and a severe looking man at that.

"Surely," Tom told himself, as he saw them bending their heads closer together as though consulting, "they must believe Lucille when they compare her truthful face with that ugly one of the sergeant. But I wish they'd ask to see my letters."

He took them out on the spur of the moment, and held them so that they might catch the eye of the prosecutor. Evidently that officer understood what the boy intended to convey, for he at once held out his hand, into which Tom hastily crammed the little packet.

The simple look of the envelopes with their Uncle Sam stamps and postmarks had been enough for that Uhlan. Apparently these Frenchmen were more difficult to convince; or else they wished to really know more about the prisoners who had been accused of communicating with the enemy, the gravest offense possible in times of war and invasion.

"Good, they're looking at the letters inside," Tom muttered to Lucille; "then it stands to reason they can read English, anyway. If they only ask me to tell my side of how I was nabbed by that coward there, I'd be glad to do it."

"Do you think they believed me, Tom?" asked Lucille, faintly, as though doubts were already assailing her mind.

"Sure they must," Tom told her. "They'd be a queer lot not to, I say. Anybody could see with one eye that you've got truth stamped on your face. I've known you to stand for being punished more'n once just because you couldn't tell even a fib."

Lucille sighed again. She was not quite so positive as her brother, it seemed, when it came to believing that her story and manner had been so convincing.

The officers were smiling now. Tom took heart at that.

"They've struck some of those funny things Larry wrote in his letter to me," he told Lucille; "and after that they must certainly believe we're what we claim. I can see that sergeant's finish already, and serve him right. I might excuse his trying to put it over me, but to try and make out that my sister was a German spy is too much."

Just then Lucille's little hand gripped him.

"Oh! Tom, now it's surely going to be all right; for look who's just come in."

"Bully, and again I say bully!" breathed Tom; "for it's our good friend, Monsieur Armand, and one of those officers with him is the same fine soldier we saw him talking with in Paris — General Joffre, the French commander-in-chief!"

CHAPTER XXII

THE BATTLE

IMMEDIATELY upon the entrance of the little party all the officers at the table jumped to their feet, and hastened to salute their commander in regulation military fashion.

Of course they forgot all about Tom and Lucille. The chances were General Joffre had come here to carry out a certain purpose, which could only be for serious consultation with other commanders who would meet him.

Just about then it happened that Monsieur Armand caught sight of the two figures standing back. He was plainly surprised to see them, and it could only be pleasure that brought that smile to his face.

He evidently had nothing to do with the consultation that was about to take place, for he at once hurried over to the young people, with outstretched hand.

"I am delighted to see you both again," he said, in a low tone, so that he might not interrupt the conversation of the officers. "But tell me, what does it mean that you are here at Headquarters, and looking so miserable?"

"Why, it means that we have been arrested,

charged with being German spies, Monsieur Armand!" Lucille told him, her eyes flashing indignation.

At that the other seemed to hardly know whether to laugh or look serious.

"Surely, little ma'm'selle, it must be a silly charge to make," he observed, presently, when he saw that the girl was really in earnest.

"So I was just telling the colonel there, when he asked me for my story," Lucille continued; "but that sergeant, who saw us waving our handkerchiefs to each other in fun, has made a terrible yarn out of whole cloth; to hear him talk you'd believe we were monsters. But you can clear us; can't you, Monsieur? You know that we are good Americans, and would sooner die than lift a hand against France?"

"To be sure I do," he assured her; "and first of all tell me what has happened since I last saw you — it was in Paris, I believe."

"Yes, and you had just been talking with General Joffre, who was an old friend of yours, you said," Lucille continued, eagerly.

Then as rapidly as she could she sketched what the reader already knows, and in much the same manner as she had related the facts to the officers sitting in court martial.

When he had heard the brief outline of their adventures, after starting on the long anticipated auto-

mobile tour through Northern France, Monsieur Armand nodded his head, and tapped Lucille confidently on the shoulder.

"Have no fears as to the result, little one," he told her; "it is foolish, this grave charge against you and your brother. I will manage to say a few words to the colonel, and he must immediately discharge you from custody. Indeed, even if I had not chanced to come upon the scene I am confident they would have believed your story, and reprimanded the sergeant. But it is all right now."

A large and dusty car swung up in front of the Headquarters tent just then, from which several officers dressed in khaki descended.

"They are British!" whispered Lucille, as she saw them enter.

"And as sure as I live," added Tom, "I do believe that one in the lead, who is shaking hands with General Joffre, must be General French, the head of the British forces in the field. He looks like a picture I once saw of him, anyway."

"It is as you say, my boy," whispered Monsieur Armand; "they are here for a consultation, and we must leave the place at once. I will catch the eye of the colonel, whom I happen to know, and arrange it so that you will be free to go."

It struck Tom that their mysterious friend knew about all the French officers and seemed to possess their confidence to a considerable extent. Later on

Tom realized that M. Armand must have been a person of considerable importance, perhaps a trusted secret agent, or else a special bodyguard for the French commander-in-chief.

A minute later M. Armand must have accomplished what he had spoken of, for the officer who had been in charge of the proceedings came over to where the little group stood.

The first thing he did was to shake hands heartily with M. Armand, who thereupon in a low tone began to assure him that he would stand sponsor for the prisoners, being entirely innocent. No doubt he took occasion to tell how he had met them in London, and later in Paris.

At that the colonel hastened to offer his hand first to Lucille, to whom he bowed most politely, and then to Tom.

"We had already decided that the sergeant had overdone the matter, in his zeal to serve the cause, or to exalt his own prowess," he told Lucille, in French; "but we are of course pleased to have M. Armand vouch for you. Consider yourselves free to go as you will, and accept a thousand pardons for the inconvenience we have caused you. I trust you will find your worthy uncle safe when you return to where you left him. M. Armand will take charge of you from now on."

That meant of course they had better leave the Headquarters tent, which would be needed for the

serious consultation between the leaders of the Allies. Tom was only too glad of the opportunity to do this. He would have liked to give that malicious sergeant a piece of his mind, but two things prevented, he could not speak French — and the man had already cleared out.

Once outside M. Armand led them to where they could sit under a tree and talk. The thunder of heavy guns was increasing, and making the earth tremble.

“Of course you’re wondering how I happen to be up here,” the gentleman said, with a twinkle in his black eyes. “Well, first of all, I’m a Frenchman, and deeply interested in what is going on. Then again I have learned that the two men whose signatures are of vital importance to me are in the army, fighting on the firing line. So I can kill two birds with one stone, as you call it, by coming up here.”

Perhaps this was the truth, but somehow Tom fancied that Monsieur Armand had other reasons for being at the front. It was really none of their business, however, and Tom tried not to let himself show any undue curiosity.

“And now, we must get back to uncle, Tom!” suggested Lucille.

“But did you not tell me you had left him at the hospital in the town that lies in the valley?” demanded the gentleman.

"Yes, he was there yesterday when we started out for that little stroll," replied the girl; "and ever since that terrible firing started both of us have been worried about him. Could you find some way to get us back there, Monsieur? It would relieve our hearts very much."

He shook his head.

"I am afraid it could not be done during the daytime, my child," he told them, with an air that carried conviction.

"He means, Lueille," explained Tom, "that all day long there's likely to be a smashing of walls, and bursting of shells through sections of the town that happen to come within range of the German guns. It's a French town, you must remember, and some of the gunners would take delight in knocking buildings over. The more damage they do here the worse France will feel the war."

"That is what I meant," the gentleman observed; "so it will be necessary for us to wait until night comes. Then the fire will slacken, if not die out entirely."

"Will you arrange it for us so that we can go then, please?" begged Lucille.

"Not only that," came the reply, "but as I expect to remain about here for some little time I myself will accompany you, if the general gives us a guard to protect us against German snipers."

Both of them thanked him on hearing that.

"Let's hope, then," said Tom, "that the Red Cross flag will keep the shells away from the hospital, and that uncle is unharmed. But just hear the way they're getting warmed up! How I'd like to be able to say I'd seen an actual battle, even from a distance."

"Then perhaps I can favor you, Tom," offered M. Armand, pleasantly. "It happens that I am carrying the field-glasses of General Joffre at this very moment, and close by I can see a vantage point from which a good view of the valley and the range of hills beyond may be gained. Come with me, both of you, for I imagine the conference inside there will last some time."

He led the way to a little elevation, and Tom saw that this would very likely be used by the Headquarters officers to command a comprehensive view of what was going on for miles along the valley.

The glasses turned out to be very fine ones and they looked long and earnestly along the crest of the hills. It was easy to mark the place where each big gun had been placed. When one of these was discharged Tom was even able to follow the flight of the great shell through the air until it landed and burst.

"I never expected to see this day, that's sure," he exclaimed, after witnessing this remarkable thing several times; "and I can see where some of our hits are made up there, too. One threw up a heap

of dirt and stones just then; and yes, sir, it must have smashed a gun too, from the looks, and the way they're running about!"

Of course M. Armand was eager to see if this were so; and after convincing himself that the French gunners had made a clean hit he passed the glasses over to Lucille, so that she too might enjoy seeing the result of clever shooting.

A short time later they discovered a movement some miles away that indicated a valiant charge on the part of the French infantry to take a certain elevation that would be of considerable advantage to the side possessing it.

The Germans had mounted guns in position, and were doubtless in force, backed by machine guns that could mow long gaps in the lines of charging troops.

Thrilled by the terrible picture, they stood and watched, falling back when the officers came hurrying from the tent to observe the success or failure of the offensive movement.

On such a bright day there was no difficulty in seeing what transpired with the naked eye, especially when one had youth and clear vision in his favor.

The onrushing wearers of the red trousers began to scatter as they drew closer to the danger line. Tom saw that they were up to all the tricks that savage warfare teaches, such as dodging behind rocks and trees, and constantly working forward.

"They're not like the Germans, who charge in solid formation," he told Lucille. "In this way the machine guns do only one-tenth of the execution they would if the ranks were solid."

"I can see that you know what you are talking about, Tom," observed M. Armand. "The Algerian troops who are charging have learned their lesson. Mark my words well when I say I believe they will not stop until they have taken that position, cost what it may."

Fascinated they stood there and watched as the fight proceeded. Twice it appeared as though the hot fire poured down on them by the Germans was too much, for the assailants hesitated, and drew back; but it was only to get their second wind, for soon they were again pushing resolutely on.

"Now they've reached the trenches, and are over!" exclaimed the excited Tom. "Oh look at them climb, and fight hand-to-hand. If they give up now not a man will ever come back alive! But they win, Lucille, they win! See them going in, will you; and look, there's our flag floating over the place. They've captured it at the point of the bayonet!"

Thrilled by the spectacle Tom forgot that he was considered a non-combatant, and added his young voice to swell the mad cheers that ran along the Allies' line.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHEN GUN ANSWERED GUN

THE day crept on.

There was never a time when that dreadful anvil chorus was not in full blast, now loud, and again softened somewhat by distance. Over the valley most of the time there hung a pall of powder smoke, until occasionally a fresh breeze would arise to sweep it away.

“And just to think,” said Tom, who sat beside Lucille on the lookout mound, their kind friend having left them, on other matters, promising to return later — “just to think, this same thing is going on along a hundred miles, where the armies face each other. The Kaiser is getting his fill of fighting these days, with the Russians hammering away out there in East Prussia, and the Belgians holding them off in the Low Countries.”

It was now the middle of the day. At times it seemed as though some sort of fierce fight might be going on for the trenches on the disputed point, since reënforcements were sent hurriedly up the slope, and the roar and cheers of hosts engaged in battle floated to the ears of the two who looked and listened.

"But the Germans didn't take it back, did they?" asked Lucille, when the smoke-shrouded point again became fairly quiet.

"I don't think they did," Tom told her; "because there goes another lot of French zouaves up the hill; and you notice that they're not fired on from above. They mean to hold that position if they can. It must be an important place for the side that keeps it. There, you can see artillery going up. Now a shell bursts among them."

"Oh! see the poor horses jump; and, Tom, there are several of them down!"

"Yes, it's hard on the horses; but those guns have got to be taken up," the boy grimly told her. "Now see how the men swarm around. Every one who can get a grip on the wheels or any other part is pushing and pulling like mad. It's moving, too, and they deserve to get it up on that point!"

In this way the time passed. There was always something going on to rivet their attention. The novelty never seemed to wear away, for new developments were constantly occurring along the battle line.

The Germans would not come down from their elevated positions, and the French could only carry the trenches with frightful loss. So the artillery duel kept up all through the day, until it seemed as though the sound of great guns being discharged,

and shells exploding with muffled roar would deafen every one.

That afternoon, as they sat by themselves, under the shade of a tree, Tom and Lucille found occasion to speak again of their mysterious friend, M. Armand.

"After all, that was one of the luckiest things we ever had happen to us, Tom," the girl remarked, when her brother mentioned the singular way in which they had come to meet the gentleman.

"I guess you're right, there," he admitted, "though it was a little rough on uncle. If Monsieur hadn't happened to be Johnny-on-the-Spot at that time the motor 'bus might have run over him."

"Yes, but think how nice it is for us to have such a splendid friend back of us here," Lucille continued.

"He says we would have convinced them that it was all a put-up job," remarked Tom, "even without any help from him. But I'm not so sure about it. And anyway, when he vouched for us that settled the whole business. I wonder who M. Armand is, and how he comes to be so thick with such famous men as General Joffre? Didn't you see him introduced to the British leader, too; and the way General French shook hands with him? I guess our friend isn't just the ordinary citizen of France he claims to be."

"Tom, you've got some sort of idea in your

head; I can recognize the signs every time. Now own up, and tell me what you think!" Lucille urged, with that vein of feminine authority in her voice that Tom never tried to combat.

"Why, of course it's only a hit-and-miss guess of mine," he started to say.

"I understand that," she told him, "and I promise not to condemn it without the proper consideration. Is he a French spy, as somebody thought when we talked it over, after first meeting him in London?"

Tom shook his head, and smiled mysteriously.

"I hardly think so common a person as a spy would be on such terms of intimacy — is that the right word to use? — with famous generals. And I don't believe the French commander would introduce a spy to General French, as I saw him do. No, our friend is something on a higher plane."

"What can you mean, Tom?"

"Why, I was thinking," said the boy, earnestly, "that perhaps M. Armand is a personal representative of President Poincaré. He seems to be treated with great consideration. We saw him in London; perhaps he was over there to have a secret consultation with King George and his Ministers, about the threatening war cloud."

"But it hadn't broken out then, had it?" demanded Lucille.

“ Oh! shucks! they’ve been expecting *something* to happen for quite a while, over in England. They must have known what Germany was aiming at, expecting to bluff Russia into backing down. There’s a heap of secret history about the causes of this war that will come out sooner or later. Between you and me I think Monsieur Armand knows lots of it right now.”

Something happened to draw their attention to another subject just then, and so they forgot to say anything more concerning their strange friend, or the real mission that had brought him to the fighting line. That story about his wanting to get signatures to some document might have a grain of truth in it; and again it was apt to be only a side issue that counted for very little.

They saw the day declining with considerable satisfaction.

“ Notice that the firing is already beginning to die down, Lucille,” Tom mentioned about an hour before sunset; “ which I take as a good sign.”

“ They’re tired of wasting so much ammunition, I suppose, and doing so little real good with it!” the girl suggested.

“ Well, you know that those big German guns are only good for a certain number of shots, and then they have to go back to the Krupp works at Essen to be rifled again. A hundred or so shots will knock

lots of them out. So that's one reason the gunners don't like to crack away just to hear the racket. Besides, every shot costs a heap of money."

"Here comes our good friend again, Tom."

"I hope he hasn't changed his mind about going with us to the town after night sets in," remarked the boy, softly, so that Monsieur Armand might not hear what he was saying.

The gentleman came up with a cheery smile on his dark face. As before he extended a hand to each of his young friends, and his grip was certainly a hearty one.

"General Joffre has gone away with the British officers to look over some part of the line, and will not be back until late to-night," he remarked. "Supper—a genuine army camp supper, will be served presently, and I have ordered ours to be brought out here, for I invite myself to eat with you two."

"That is nice of you, Monsieur Armand," said Lucille, politely, while her eyes danced with pleasure. "We were just saying we hoped you were not going to disappoint us about taking us to the town to-night."

At that he looked grave.

"I am wondering," he said, "whether it is the right thing to expose you, a girl, to danger such as there must be in a disputed town lying between rival armies."

Lucille at once took the alarm.

"Oh! but you wouldn't think of leaving me behind!" she exclaimed. "Indeed, I am accustomed to doing all sorts of things such as boys attempt. My brother will tell you I am a regular tomboy. I always loved to be in the snowball fights, to ride on a bobsled, skate, play hockey, and lots of other sports as well. Why, I can even throw a baseball from second base home; can't I, Tom? And few girls could ever do that. So I want to go with you; I would be most unhappy if you didn't let me."

Like the dutiful brother that he was, Tom gallantly came to the assistance of his "pal," and hastened to convince Monsieur that Lucille was different from ordinary girls; in fact as good and sturdy a chum as he ever knew.

"Oh! well," said the other, laughingly, at last, "you overwhelm me with reasons why I should give in, and I suppose I'll have to do as you wish. But somehow I hardly feel justified in taking the risk. Perhaps, though, we may not meet with any such hazards as I'm anticipating. I hope it may be that way, for the sake of the little ma'm'selle. War is no place for women or girls; it is bad enough for even strong men."

Tom knew that he meant they were apt to meet with grewsome sights upon entering the town, especially if, as was feared, it had been shelled from time to time during the day and a half of bombardment.

But Lucille seemed pleased with the promise she had influenced the other to make.

"You see, Tom and I have always been chums, and not like ordinary brother and sister," she explained to the amused and interested gentleman, who seemed to have taken a decided liking to the bright American girl; "and it would be too bad to separate us. I am generally able to stand anything he can, except at meal times, and I have to give in to him there."

"You're mentioning that," Tom declared, "because you saw those soldiers heading this way with a lot of things that are steaming, and make my mouth water. Even French army cooks seem to know how to put things together to make them taste good."

The camp supper was delicious—even Lucille admitted that much. No doubt the fact of their being free of suspicion had considerable to do with the enjoyment she felt at partaking of the meal. As for Tom, he had never known a time, even when crossing the choppy seas of the English Channel, when he could not eat.

By the time they had finished the sun was setting in the west. Luckily the firing had ceased save in one quarter where some object the Germans had in view was causing them to keep hammering away at stated intervals.

M. Armand had obtained another pair of field

glasses, and carefully surveyed the territory that they would have to cover in approaching the town. This latter chanced to be hidden from their eyrie by a projecting spur of the hills; but nevertheless it was easy to lay out a route that, if persisted in, would take them to their objective point.

In doing this he often asked Tom's opinion, nor was this simply a compliment on the part of the gentleman; for he quickly learned that the wide-awake scout had learned many things that were apt to prove of value under such conditions.

"I suppose that the sooner we start the better," suggested M. Armand; and standing up he made a motion with his arm.

Some one must have been keeping a watchful eye on him for just this signal; because almost immediately Tom saw a dozen well-armed soldiers advancing in formation, all of whom had the earmarks of experienced sharpshooters.

This detachment was to serve as their guard, for there must be more or less danger that in venturing into the disputed town they might suddenly run upon some enemies who were there for another purpose than merely the rescue of an endangered inmate of the hospital.

They started forth, and as nothing arose to bar their progress inside of a little more than an hour Tom whispered to Lucille that they were close to the border of the town. A chill came upon their

spirits, for how different everything seemed! No matter how they listened they could hear none of the familiar sounds. Merry laughter, the chattering of women, voices of children, barking of dogs — all were of the past, and now only a brooding silence that boded much of evil hung over the place.

CHAPTER XXIV

AMIDST CRUMBLING WALLS

"Tom, what does it all mean?" whispered Lucille, as they stopped just on the edge of the town, while M. Armand conferred with the one in charge of their guards.

"I'm afraid the town's been bombarded!" he replied, slowly, as though the idea revolted him.

"And have the poor people been killed?" she continued, her voice quivering with horror.

"Oh! that doesn't have to follow," Tom reassured her; "they may have been warned to leave their homes by the French, when the shells began to burst in the streets, and knock the walls of the houses down. Look at that one, and think what a hundred like it would do."

He pointed to a building close by, which, seen in the weird moonlight, looked almost like a crumbling ruin. Yet Lucille had admired the quaint architectural design of that very house only a week before.

Their guide must have concluded his arrangements with the sergeant in charge of the detachment of French soldiers, for he motioned the others to follow. So they entered the town.

How ghostly the whole thing seemed, with the white moonlight sifting over the apparently deserted buildings. Tom quickly discovered, however, that people were yet to be found amid the ruins.

"There goes a man — several people in fact — and not soldiers either," he told Lucille.

"Yes, and over on the right you can see others," she added. "Oh! they seem like ghosts prowling about, or else wolves trying to find something to eat. Where have they come from, Tom?"

"I've got an idea they must be some of those who refused to leave their homes when the shells began to burst in the streets. All day they hide in the cellars, to creep out at night, after the firing has stopped."

"How dreadful a life that must be!" she sighed.

"Some houses have escaped without a scratch, so far as I can see," pursued Tom, bound to make the most of his opportunities for seeing a town that had suffered from modern gun-fire, "and others are nearly tumbling down."

"Oh! look at that church spire, Tom!" exclaimed the girl, pulling at his sleeve, as with her other hand she pointed upward.

They were close enough to the sacred edifice to see clearly the whole of the steeple outlined against the heavens. Perhaps it had been taken as a range-finder by some German gunner up on the heights miles away. If so his figuring must have

been accurate, for the shell had torn out one side of the support of the stately spire.

"What a terrible gap that is," observed Tom.

"It looks as though it would fall over any minute," Lucille added. "You don't think that might happen while we're underneath, do you, Tom?"

He laughed at her fears. A fleecy white cloud drifting past the apex of the cross doubtless gave Lucille the impression that the imperiled spire was even then in motion.

"Oh! I guess it'll stand for some time yet," Tom told her. "Perhaps until a big wind comes along, and then — good-by."

As they progressed from one street to another they saw more shifting figures that had crept from their hiding places. These frightened people always shrank back at the approach of the patrol. When, however, they recognized the beloved red trousers of the French soldiers their confidence seemed to return.

Women even stopped M. Armand, whom they appeared to recognize as some sort of leader, and in trembling voices apparently besought him to advise them as to what they should do, and whether there was any chance of the terrible Germans being driven away from the hills.

At least that was what Tom fancied they must be saying, judging from their actions, and the way they kept wringing their hands.

The boy had never before felt his heart throb so with pity as just then. He heard M. Armand speak kindly yet firmly to those who besought his advice; and Tom, listening still, was of the opinion that he told them they had better leave the town before another day ushered in a still more deadly bombardment.

The women turned away with downcast eyes. Their last hope had been shattered; yet many of them would doubtless still contrive to cling to their homes, in spite of the increasing perils that surrounded them.

"Some places seem to have been more lucky than others, it strikes me," Tom told his sister, as they began to draw near the heart of the town.

"Yes, for we haven't seen more than one damaged house out of the last dozen," she continued, hopefully. "Do you think that can mean they tried to keep from dropping their awful shells near the hospital?"

"It may have been that," Tom replied uneasily, "and then again perhaps it's just a freak. That's the way things go; one part gets more than its share, while others escape. There, you see, we've struck another place where several shells must have burst, for the walls of the houses are wrecked terribly."

"Oh! look, they are carrying some one on a litter!" whispered Lucille.

"That must be the Red Cross corps at work,"

said Tom, in a hushed tone, as he watched the two silent figures pass, and heard the groaning of the unfortunate whom they were taking with them.

"But, Tom, they are going the other way!" complained Lucille.

Tom had himself already noted that the men who bore the stretcher did not seem to be heading toward the place where they knew the hospital stood. He felt that in itself this was a bad omen; but there was no need of depressing the spirits of Lucille so soon by admitting his fears.

"Oh! well, there has been a heap of warm work since we were here, you know, sis, and the accommodations up there were limited after all. It might be that before now every cot has been occupied, and so they have to take any new cases back of the French lines to some field hospital."

"Do you think so, Tom?" she asked hesitatingly, as though she doubted the accuracy of this suggestion. "They must have taken that poor soul out of some house where a falling wall or flying bullet caught her. But I'm glad we don't see any terrible sights on the streets. I was afraid of that."

Tom did not tell her what he had seen, for he was too discreet to add to her discomfort. Besides, he really feared that they were going to get more or less of a shock presently, when they had arrived in the neighborhood of the spot at which the hospital was located.

Unfortunately this building had been erected without the least thought of a time coming when hostile guns might be turned on the French town. It was on a slight elevation, and from its piazza a fine view could be obtained of the rest of the town.

In times of peace this was very nice, and its elevation afforded the best of air to the inmates. But when conditions changed, and war-clouds gathered, its position could hardly have been worse.

Conspicuous objects are sure at such times to draw gun-fire from the distant enemy. Even the flag with the Red Cross marked upon a white background may either be unnoticed or else purposely ignored.

Tom had heard from M. Armand that the hospital had suffered, though just how seriously he could not say. As it would not do any possible good, and be a source of considerable sorrow to Lucille, Tom had intentionally failed to pass this information along. But it was with considerable anxiety that he now found himself drawing near the spot.

He was hugging the hope to his heart that even though the hospital had been an object of attack, and part of it wrecked by shells, still, some of the patients might have survived. There were possibly cellars in which they could cower during the day, like other wretched people of the town, and where it was reasonably safe to remain.

"Our poor friend the innkeeper didn't escape damage, it seems," Tom remarked, as they approached the familiar corner where stood the quaint house whose friendly roof had sheltered them all the trying days and nights while Uncle Alvin was in the hospital.

"Tom, see how the wall is torn open just at the place where we had our little rooms!" Lucille exclaimed in dismay. "What if we had been sleeping when that happened? Yes, just as you said a while ago, we have lots to be thankful for; if only we can find poor dear uncle safe I'm not going to complain again."

"What we've suffered isn't in the same class with what these people are going through with," Tom asserted sturdily. "Some of them have already lost their homes, where they were born, and have lived all their days; and lots of others will before the end comes. Then for all we know some of those awful shells may have done worse than smash walls and church steeples. Yes, we oughtn't to whimper, no matter what happens."

"I can see one end of the hospital now, Tom!" declared Lucille.

"Yes, that's so."

"It looks as if the building still stood," she continued, hopefully.

"Why, even at the worst it wouldn't have been blown into ruins," Tom returned. "We might

find that there were several holes through the walls; and perhaps that the nurses had decided to remove the patients to a safer place. Uncle was able to walk, you know, and could have gone fairly well."

Something about his tone, his manner, seemed to arouse her suspicions, for Lucille immediately turned on him to ask:

"Tom, you know something that you've been keeping from me. You're trying to break it gradually. Did you hear that the hospital had been struck? Tell me, for we'll know the worst in a minute or two."

"Why, they say it did not escape entirely," admitted Tom, forced to confess at last.

"You didn't hear anything definite, then; I mean anything about uncle?" the girl continued, desperately.

"Not a single thing, Lucille, I give you my word on it. Even if the building was badly wrecked that wouldn't mean he was hurt. We'll find that Uncle Alvin is able to take care of himself."

Lucille tried to draw in fresh courage as they continued to advance toward the slight elevation on which the building had stood.

More and more clearly they began to see the walls. When Lucille detected a spot where a yawning aperture could be seen, her heart gave a violent throb.

"Oh! I hope they were all out before that shell

passed through," she breathed; for only too well did she know where it must have carried destruction before making that breach, to finally burst in the street, where that pile of dirt had been thrown up. (See Note 10.)

Then they came in sight of the entire building, but to the dismay of Lucille it was apparently deserted, with no hurrying nurses, no doctors passing back and forth, no gleaming lights — only an edifice shorn of its glory, and wrecked.

CHAPTER XXV

THE ABANDONED HOSPITAL

THERE could be no doubt that the hospital was deserted. The work of waiting on the many patients the staff would have to take care of, after the desperate fighting they had witnessed from the headquarters of the Allies, could not be carried on in darkness and gloom.

“It looks as though they must have pulled out when they found it was getting too hot here,” Tom hastened to say, hoping to soften the blow. “You see, it happens, worse luck, that this building was in the direct line of fire from the German batteries up on the hills, and so of course it suffered.”

Their kind conductor now turned to them. He knew they must be greatly disappointed at finding things so desolate.

“We must look inside, to make sure no one is hiding in some room, or it may be in the cellars,” he told them. “I will leave a part of our guard with you here, while I perform that duty. Depend upon it, your fears must be greater than the truth will appear. Wait for us here, my young friends.”

Tom would have liked to accompany him, but he did not wish to leave Lucille alone with the soldiers.

There was no telling when some prowling Germans might try to enter the town, either on a scouting mission, or in search of loot.

They stood talking in low tones and waiting anxiously. Before entering the hospital one of the soldiers had lighted a lantern, since they would need some means of illumination when stumbling about amidst the wreckage.

Tom and his sister followed the passage of that flickering light from place to place. Knowing the location of each room as they did, they could easily keep track of the progress of the searching party.

The minutes passed slowly, and no doubt seemed doubly long to the two anxious hearts waiting to learn the outcome.

"They seem to have come up from below, Tom," breathed Lucille, faintly, as the moving lantern could again be seen.

"Yes, that's so," he replied.

"I can see them starting out of the door now," she continued. "There, they move along in front of the building toward where that largest gap lies. But I don't seem to make out that they're carrying any one, Tom?"

"Of course not," Tom replied. "If there were any persons hurt here, the Red Cross nurses would see that they were taken away long before now, shells or no shells. They never hold back because it's dangerous."

"But — he didn't find uncle at all, you see!" she fretted.

"Which I take to mean that uncle is too wise to be caught napping. He got away in time, perhaps when the first crash told that the Germans were forgetting about the flag on top of the hospital."

"Then you really hope he may be safe, do you?" Lucille demanded, seizing him by the sleeve.

"I certainly do. But here comes M. Armand. Let's hear what he has to say about it."

A minute later they were joined by the other portion of the detachment. The lantern had been extinguished as soon as they issued forth from the deserted hospital building.

"He is certainly not there, children," M. Armand told them as he came up. "We searched through the entire building, even invading the cellars; but found not a single living human being. There is a poor half-starved hunting dog tied there, that may have belonged to some one, that is all."

"Oh! that must be Doctor Jacques's dog, Mina," cried Lucille. "In his haste to get away, and remove his patients he has forgotten all about the poor thing."

Tom was uneasy. He wondered whether the searching party could have made any unpleasant discovery when they were in the building. M. Armand had declared that no "living human being"

remained, but could that imply there were those who had died from the effect of some exploding shell?

He must know the worst, and so he asked:

“Then you feel sure, do you, sir, that our uncle must have managed to leave his quarters?”

M. Armand shrugged his shoulders as only Frenchmen know how, to express much more than mere words can convey.

“It would seem so, since living or dead he is certainly not in there now,” he told them, greatly to Tom’s relief, for now he was sure things could not be so bad as he had feared.

“Oh! thank you for saying that!” murmured Lucille, and Tom imagined she must have been thinking along the same lines as himself.

“See, I am frank with you, children,” continued the other, tenderly, as if he realized what their fears may have been; “yes, it is so, there is one poor fellow inside who met his fate as became a true son of France, and in the discharge of his duty; but he was a hospital attendant; not your old uncle. That building may yet be his sepulcher if the invaders on the heights keep turning their guns on it much longer.”

They had started to leave the place, and Tom was just about to ask their kind guardian how they might best learn whether the late inmates of the hospital had been taken to the rear of the French lines, when something unexpected occurred.

Around a corner just beyond they heard a scuffling sound. Then dim figures were seen advancing, dodging this way and that. The moonlight gleamed on bright steel; and they heard a heavy voice giving what seemed to be an order.

"It is the Germans!" Monsieur Armand exclaimed.

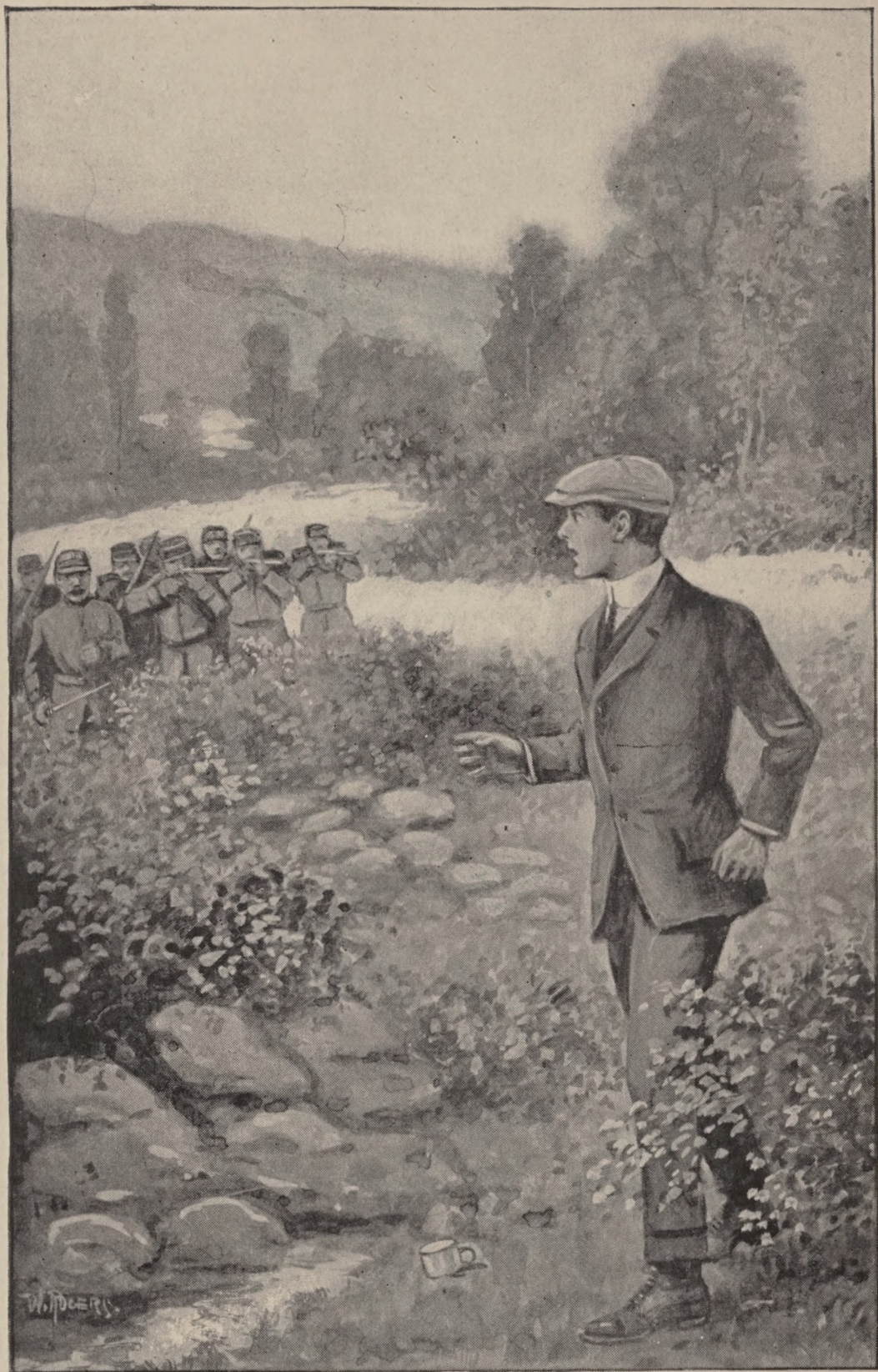
At the same instant both his hands seemed to go out, and Tom as well as Lucille found themselves dragged back of a pile of stones and bricks, torn from the wall of the house by a plunging shell.

The French guard had also heard that command in German. They knew that it spelled danger for them, and every man instantly dodged for such shelter as offered; some even throwing themselves flat upon their faces on the street.

Almost instantly a gun was fired. It came from the skulking figures beyond, and Tom heard the spiteful hiss of the leaden messenger as it passed close to his head. He drew his sister closer, as though willing to shield her with his own body, if necessary, from the threatening peril.

Then other guns were discharged, close beside them. The men with the baggy red trousers whom M. Armand had picked out to accompany the exploring party into the town, were getting busy.

Tom afterwards learned that these men had seen much service among the sand dunes of the Algerian



Tom found himself covered by several rifles gripped in the hands of men who wore baggy red trousers—French soldiers of the line.

deserts, and were experienced sharpshooters. They knew all about the tricks of savage warfare, and would prove more than a match for ordinary foes.

It happened that one of the French soldiers was struck in the arm at the first exchange of shots. He was close beside Tom, and the boy, turning his head, saw him making desperate efforts to raise his gun, but without the power to control the muscles of his arm.

Hardly knowing what he was doing, but spurred on by the feeling of indignation that overpowered him, Tom crawled out and took the gun from the hands of the wounded soldier.

Back again to the shelter of the pile of wreckage he slipped. It all had taken but a few seconds.

Here and there could be seen splashes of vivid flame. These located the positions of the Germans who had entered the town, either on a reconnaissance, or for purposes of looting.

Tom, still burning with his sudden zeal, actually discharged his gun in the direction of the next flash he saw. Neutral? Yes, but when attacked he certainly must maintain the right to defend himself and Lucille.

The rapid exchange of shots continued for a brief period. Then unable to repress their ardor any longer the French soldiers from Algeria gave vent to a series of shrill yells, such as possibly they had learned from some of the savage mountain tribes-

men whom they were accustomed to fighting in Northern Africa.

“They are charging them!” cried Tom, starting to scramble up; but on one side M. Armand, and on the other Lucille, pulled him back again.

“That is their affair, not yours, children!” he heard Monsieur say, chidingly, as the patter of swiftly moving feet told that the French soldiers were in full pursuit of the invaders. “But I must declare that this boy is a credit to the Maillards.”

The sergeant was a discreet man, and not likely to allow his command to overdo matters, so as to run into any ambushade. After chasing the Germans out of town and accomplishing what damage was possible, he would return once more to the spot where the others had been left.

Meanwhile M. Armand bent over the wounded man, who was now sitting up, calmly trying to knot a handkerchief around his damaged arm. When Tom saw what was needed he quickly sprang to assist, for as has been shown before, the boy knew many of the leading principles of first aid to the injured.

By the time they heard returning footsteps, and the command came up the street, carrying several guns, and a spiked helmet as spoils of war, the soldier had been treated so that the bleeding of his wound was fairly stopped.

At least the Germans had discovered that it was not safe for them to come down by night to the bombarded town in search of wine or other things. They were liable to meet with unpleasant surprises in attempting this sort of thing, and be sent back up the slopes faster than they had descended.

"And now, what can we do to try and find uncle?" asked Lucille, when they were all together again.

"If you feel equal to a long tramp," explained M. Armand, "we can start out and visit one or two of the field hospitals that are to be found in the rear of our trenches. As a rule these are beyond the range of the enemy's guns. It would be to such a place, I should think, he would be apt to go."

"I wish we could find some one to give us a little information," remarked Tom.

"Perhaps we might," the girl suggested, hopefully. "Just a little bit ago I'm almost sure I heard some one cough over there at the inn. And, Tom, you remember how Monsieur Labaudy, the landlord, used to have such a funny way of doing that? After all it might be he hasn't had the heart to desert his place, or else he comes back at night to guard it from pillagers."

"We must find out about it," said Tom, "because he would be apt to know what became of Uncle Alvin. Don't you say the same thing, sir? This inn-

keeper was like a town newspaper; he knew everything that was going on. Shall we try to find him?"

"It could do no harm, and might give us a clue that would save more or less exertion," their guardian readily replied.

The inn had been struck, but was far from being a wreck, as they saw when they drew close to its solid walls. A frame building would have gone down like a pack of cards, under such a terrible impact; but they build sturdily in Old World countries, and the walls of even an humble cottage can stand a deal of hammering.

Hardly had they reached the closed door, upon which M. Armand beat with his fist, calling the name of Monsieur Labaudy at the same time, than a window was cautiously pushed open in the upper story, and a head projecting announced that Tom's guess had hit the mark, for the innkeeper was even then under his own roof.

There ensued an exchange of words, and upon learning that they were not hostile Germans who had summoned him, the landlord came down and out.

He seemed considerably surprised, and pleased as well, to discover the two young Americans who had been his guests through all the troublous times.

"We are looking for our uncle, who, as you know, was a patient over there in the hospital,"

Lucille said. "He is not there now, and every one seems to have gone away, even Doctor Jacques. Can you tell us anything about our uncle? Did you see them when they departed? Oh! please hurry and tell us."

The innkeeper must have been able to understand her French, for he nodded his head immediately.

"Yes, it is as you say, ma'm'selle," he hastened to tell her. "I was here last night when they departed. Men came with stretchers, and carried away all who were wounded; and many of them were brave soldiers of France who had fallen in the fighting close by. They said they were taking them to safer quarters. The shells of the barbarians up there did not spare the Red Cross flag any more than they did my poor inn."

"But our uncle was able to walk, you remember," Lucille continued. "We were to have gone away this very day, as he was feeling ever so much better. Tell us, did you see him leave? Surely you remember him, the man with the happy look on his face, as you called him, the day I took you over to talk with him?"

"I saw him go, I assure you, ma'm'selle," the innkeeper admitted, at which assertion both Tom and his sister breathed freer; for even the boy could tell that the answer had been favorable.

"But not alone, surely; he must have gone in some one's company?" continued Lucille.

“It was the queer little Englishman and his wife who stopped here at my inn; yes, and there was Doctor Jacques as well. They went away, all of them, last night; and the stout madame she did have her arm about your uncle to assist him. I think she was better able than any of the rest. Depend on it, ma’m’selle, your relative he is safe somewhere at this moment.”

CHAPTER XXVI

ON THE TRACK OF UNCLE ALVIN

"THINGS are looking brighter all the while," declared Tom, after Lucille had told him what the innkeeper had said.

"But that doesn't mean we've found him yet, Tom, remember," she warned him. "He is in a poor state of health, and exposure, even in the summer time, might throw him back to where he was a while ago. We must still try to find him."

"Yes, I'm with you there," the boy told her, earnestly; "but after feeling as blue as we did it's a big relief to know he left here, able to walk by himself, and wasn't carried out on a stretcher."

"If you shouldn't feel like walking so far," remarked M. Armand, kindly, "there might be another way to reach the same end. By returning to headquarters we could learn whether they are connected with the different field hospitals by telephone. Then I would find out if your uncle could be located."

"But no one would know him, perhaps?" objected Lucille.

"If he stayed with Doctor Jacques we would have

something to go by," continued M. Armand: "And perhaps I could even put you in touch with the doctor himself, who would give you all necessary information at first hand."

"Are you sure about the connections, monsieur?" Tom cautiously asked.

"I regret to say I am not," came the frank reply; "although I believe it is always customary to lay wires from headquarters to all such places the first thing, since the commanding general would want to know how affairs were going with some valued officer who had been stricken in the field and carried off."

"I've got another plan to propose," said Tom, suddenly; "perhaps you'll say it's boyish and impossible, monsieur; but then again it wouldn't be any harm that I can see to try it out."

"I shall be pleased to hear what it is," said the gentleman, readily; for as has been said before he really thought considerable of Tom.

"It's about the dog," began the boy.

"Do you mean Mina?" asked Lucille, instantly.

"The hunting dog belongs to Doctor Jacques, and he told me he believed she had the greatest scent he ever met. Why, he boasted that she could follow a trail hours and hours after the game had passed."

M. Armand showed interest at once. It might be that he himself was fond of shooting over a dog

in the stubble, and could therefore appreciate what this quality on the part of Mina might mean.

"It is your idea, then," he said, a little dubiously, "to take this dog, and see if she can follow the track of her master, made last night?"

"Yes," the boy replied, "and while I know that it seems next to impossible, as I said before it wouldn't do any harm to make the try. If we found that the dog acted as though she had lost the scent for good, why we could just turn her loose, and go on about our business, making for the nearest field hospital ourselves."

"Somehow the idea appeals to me," their protector told Tom. "I am something of a sportsman myself, but I find it hard to believe any dog living can perform such a task. I should like to have it proven. Only then will I admit that the age of miracles has returned."

He turned and said something to the sergeant in charge of the squad, who immediately took one of his men, and lantern in hand hurried back toward the deserted hospital on the rise.

"They have gone to fetch the dog!" said Tom, promptly.

"Poor Mina!" murmured the girl, "she ought to have something to eat before starting out on what may be a long trip."

"Even that I have provided for, little ma'm'selle," the other informed her. "When Monsieur

Labaudy hurried back into his inn just now it was to secure some meat such as a hungry dog might swallow."

"You forget nothing, monsieur," Lucille told him. "And we have told ourselves how fortunate it was for us that you happened to pick up our uncle that day in London, when he came near swooning under the wheels of the motor 'bus. You have been a good friend to us; and we will never forget you, never!"

"I am amply rewarded by hearing you say that, believe me, children; but here they are coming back," and while M. Armand quickly changed the subject in this way, it certainly must have done his heart good to know how these two appreciated his efforts to serve them.

"They have got the dog, all right!" declared Tom.

"And the poor thing is wild to get somewhere," continued Lucille. "For twenty-four hours and more she's been tied in that cellar, with all that terrible noise going on. You couldn't blame any dog for acting so, could you, Tom?"

She spoke the dog's name as the sergeant and his companion joined them. As though recognizing a friend, the animal fawned on her, licking her hand, and jumping up to show delight.

A minute later the innkeeper made his appearance again, bearing some scraps of meat, such as

would prove a feast to a hungry dog. The animal was well acquainted with the landlord, and eagerly snapped up each portion of food as it was tossed toward her open mouth.

When the operation of feeding had been completed, while Mina might not be wholly satisfied, still she appeared far less excited, and even began putting her nose close to the ground, as though hunting for a scent.

"See, she knows what we want her to do!" exclaimed Lucille, joyously.

"It's her nature to be always smelling for traces of game, or some one she wants to find," explained Tom. "To such a dog every person has an entirely different scent."

"The sergeant will hold the leash," remarked Monsieur Armand, "but through me you shall tell us how to proceed, Tom. You see, I assume that you know more about such things perhaps than any of us. And, besides, it was your plan."

"Oh! anybody could do it, for that matter," Tom hastened to say; though of course he could not but feel flattered by what the other had declared.

After talking briefly with the stalwart sergeant, M. Armand again addressed Tom.

"Tell us what you want done, first of all, please, young m'sieu," he said. "The dog you see is already straining at the leash, and seems to be eager

to hunt around. It is likely that she hopes to learn where her master has gone, that she may follow after him."

"Tell him to let her have her head, and circle around as she pleases," Tom requested; "especially in front of the hospital, where Doctor Jacques and the rest of the party would be apt to walk when leaving."

"I can understand what you hope to gain by such a move," the other replied; and Tom believed he heard him chuckling softly to himself as though pleased with something.

All of them watched eagerly to see what would come of this little maneuver. The dog was whisking this way and that, keeping her sensitive nose close to the earth. Tom hoped that in this case the scent would lie longer than customary, though not allowing his hopes too free a rein.

"Good Mina! Find him — find Doctor Jacques!" urged Lucille, as she followed close behind the dog.

"I think she recognizes the sound of his name," Tom declared, "for when you said it I declare if that tail didn't wag faster than ever. Yes, and she gave a little whine. If a dog can do such a thing under such conditions, Mina is going to satisfy us. Watch her now!"

The animal seemed to be growing more and more excited. Three times did she drag the willing ser-

geant back to a certain place, on each occasion striking out on a different direction, only to give that effort up and try again.

It was very exciting, watching these movements of the intelligent animal, especially so to M. Armand, who had confessed to being something of a sportsman himself, and accustomed to hunting with a dog.

Tom, who knew the signs full well, encouraged his sister.

“Just give the old girl a little more chance, and I think she’ll show what she can do. Right now she believes she’s getting close up on the track of the Doc, or I miss my guess. See how she strikes out for the fourth time. There, what did I tell you, sis?”

The dog lifted her head, and gave a triumphant bay, after which she tugged violently at the leash, as though wild to be off.

“She has found the scent, most wonderful to say!” declared Monsieur Armand in amazement.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE DARING SKY PILOTS

"Good Mina! Good doggie!" Lucille could not help saying, happily, when it began to look as though there might be some hope of their being able to trace the little party that had set out from the imperiled hospital.

The dog continued to strain at the leash. At first the sergeant held her firmly in, but when M. Armand spoke to him in a voice of authority he began to give the hound her head.

There could be no question that Mina was following some sort of trail. A human tracker would have had to depend wholly on his eyes in order to discover certain marks. The dog on the other hand possessed a faculty of an altogether different order.

Tom would never have believed such a thing possible, considering all the hours that had elapsed since the fugitives had fled. Even now he told himself their joy might be short-lived, and that Mina was possibly following the trail of some other person.

"Which way are we heading, Tom?" asked his sister, a little later.

"I don't know for sure," he replied, "but it seems to me we're pushing along the front of the French trenches. There's a railroad around here somewhere, because if you listen you can hear the noise of a train coming this way."

"A train!" exclaimed Lucille, eagerly, "oh! what a fine thing it would be if we could only get aboard, and start for Paris, or Havre, or somewhere away from this terrible region."

"I'd like it about as much as you would, but I'm afraid we haven't a ghost of a show. The train is heading this way, and chances are it's made up of freight cars, or vans, as they call them here, every one chock-full of soldiers, or ammunition for the big guns. I think I heard the Allies here were short of powder, and that train may be fetching it."

"But it's got to go back again, somehow or other, Tom, hasn't it?" the girl continued, with great anxiety.

"I should think so, or else they'd run short of vans down south," Tom replied.

"Then why couldn't we get authority from some one to go aboard when it does go? After we've found uncle I don't want to stay another minute around here," and Tom could feel the little hand he held quiver with emotion.

"I don't blame you for feeling that way, Lucille," he told her, "and while I've always had an

idea I'd like to watch a battle, I'm telling you right now I've had enough."

"But how about the empty train going back south, Tom?"

"It isn't likely to be empty, I'm afraid. They'll take advantage of the opportunity to send all the wounded that can bear the trip down towards Boulogne. But your idea is worth trying out. Before we part from our good friend here, I'll ask him to do what he can for us."

"You mean M. Armand?" she whispered, looking at the figure of their mysterious guardian.

"Yes. He is the best friend anybody ever ran across," said Tom, in his boyish way. "Though I'd give a heap to know just who and what he is. But then, that's none of our business, after all, and the less said about it the better."

"Watch Mina, Tom; I'm afraid she's lost the track!" remarked Lucille, dismally.

Tom, from his superior knowledge of the ways of dogs when on the scent, immediately reassured her.

"Oh! you must expect some little slip from time to time, especially when the scent is as old as this. I'm only wondering how it happens she can find it at all; and I reckon there must be something mighty unusual about the air around here, with all this gun-fire going on to keep the scent low.

There, what did I tell you; it looks as though she felt sure again, eh?"

"She's going on, and acts as she did before, for a fact," admitted Lucille, in a relieved tone.

It was a strange experience, and no doubt one that would often recur to the memory of Tom Maillard under far different conditions, with perhaps a calm American starlight night enveloping him.

The moon was high in the heavens, and afforded them a species of illumination, though of course deceptive. They could hear certain sounds occasionally that told them they were not a great way from some section of the Allies' trenches. Now it seemed as though they were outside, and again Tom imagined they must have entered a breach in the line, for surely moving figures were to be seen between their position and the valley, beyond which rose the hills occupied by the German army.

Several times they had been challenged by alert sentries, but a whispered word always gave them freedom to proceed as before.

"Do you really believe we'll come to a field hospital after a while, Tom?"

Lucille asked this, not so much because she was anxious concerning the final outcome, since she knew that wonderful man, M. Armand, would not give up anything he had undertaken until success crowned his efforts, as because in her present

nervous condition she wanted to hear her brother whisper words of assurance in her ear.

"Haven't a bit of doubt about it," he instantly told her.

"Whether the dog succeeds or not, do you mean, Tom?"

"That's about the size of it," he continued. "I'll tell you why. Monsieur knows where these temporary hospitals have been established along the line, for there must be one at regular distances, so they won't have to move the wounded too far."

"Yes, I expect he does know all that; and heaps more besides," Lucille admitted, having by this time come to look upon M. Armand as a remarkable as well as mysterious personage, to whom few things would prove impossible.

"Well, if you watch him you'll see that he acts as though he felt satisfied," the boy continued. "I've seen him rub his hands together ever so many times, and he keeps on saying to himself something that I think must mean 'marvelous,' 'superb,' and such things."

"Oh! now I understand what you mean, Tom; knowing that we are heading for the nearest field hospital, monsieur is delighted with the way Mina leads us on. He knows we're getting there."

Tom suddenly stopped short.

"My stars! what's that up there?" he exclaimed, in sheer amazement.

Of course at his words every one looked aloft. If the moon had been discovered plunging toward the earth they could have hardly shown greater excitement.

"Oh! what a big bird, Tom!" gasped Lucille, almost unconscious of what she was saying, such was her stupefaction.

Far overhead sailed a strange, unwieldy object. Seen in the misty moonlight it had somewhat the appearance of an enormous cigar. Certainly no bird ever looked like that, as Lucille would have known if she had taken time to think.

Tom was better posted. Besides, having been a scout so long had given him the faculty of using his wits.

"Bird!" he echoed, perhaps unconsciously allowing a touch of boyish contempt to tinge his exclamation; "shucks! that's not a bird! Not by a good deal!"

"Then what can it be, Tom?" she continued; "see how it keeps moving right along, faster than that little white cloud above it! Oh! can it be a balloon, then?"

"Just what it is, Lucille, a great Zeppelin dirigible, which you know the Germans are depending on to do so much harm."

"But what can it be after now, Tom?" demanded Lucille, still staring up at the monstrous object conquering the upper air currents, and capable of

carrying a score of men for hundreds of miles, if necessary.

"They use them for dropping bombs on forts, and ships, and all that, I believe," the boy informed her calmly.

"Then I hope it doesn't sail over us now," shivered Lucille. "I've been through enough of war and its terrors without being fired at with bombs. You don't think they would notice us, do you, Tom?"

His laugh reassured her even before he spoke.

"Well, I should say not. Even in the daytime we'd be only a little speck to those Germans away up there. And much they'd want to waste their precious bombs flinging them down at a pinhead spot on the surface of the earth. Mark my word, they're after bigger game this night!"

"You mean the trenches of the Allies, don't you, Tom? Or perhaps they hope to put one of the big guns nearby out of commission?" she suggested.

"I guess it's greater even than that," Tom went on.

"Please tell me what you mean, then?" she begged him, as they continued to stand and watch the approaching airship. It sailed steadily onward, evidently bent upon an important errand.

"It must be that supply train they're after!" Tom announced.

"The ammunition that is coming up, you mean, Tom?"

"Yes, that's it," he told her; "maybe one of their *aéroplane* scouts discovered the train far south of here, and knew what a precious cargo it carried. If the Germans could only demolish the whole business you can see what a feather it'd be in their caps. Big guns without ammunition are about as useless as a sun dial without the sun."

"I understand what you mean, now, Tom. So the men up there are expecting to drop bombs down on that train we've been hearing getting nearer and nearer?"

"I heard Monsieur say something about a train to the sergeant, and that put me wise," Tom told her. "It gave me a clue, to be honest with you. And as sure as anything that's what they're meaning to do."

"But, Tom, can they hit such a small thing as a moving train from away up there? It must take a lot of skill to drop a bomb so far, and make it fall on even an acre of ground that's been marked out."

"Oh! they practice all that, let me tell you, and know how to regulate it to a dot. Besides, I may be mistaken, but right now it seems to me they're dropping down a lot lower. That means they want to make sure of their aim."

"But if they do that won't it mean the Allies will

have a greater chance to hit the balloon, and smash it?" Lucille asked, as though she believed Tom was a walking encyclopædia.

"They're willing to take that risk, in order to carry out the big plan," he continued. "Fact is, maybe they'd be ready to lose the Zeppelin, if only they could make sure the ammunition train had been blown up. These Germans are as brave as they make them nowadays; I wouldn't put anything past them. There goes the first shot. Watch and see what happens!"

Almost as soon as Tom ceased speaking they saw a flash far up in the air, though still below the swiftly moving dirigible balloon.

"That was a shell bursting," explained Tom, thrilled with excitement. "But it didn't come anywhere near the Zeppelin. Next time they'll aim to send one farther. But that will start things roaring, or else I'm much mistaken. Now listen, sis!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN THE TRENCHES

JUST as Tom said, that first shot seemed to have been a signal for the bombardment of the venture-some air navigators to begin. Guns large and small started to boom in various quarters; and quickly shells could be seen bursting in the air.

"Whew! talk to me about your Fourth of July fireworks, don't that beat anything going?" exclaimed Tom, as the entire party watched and speculated on the chances which the monster airship had of escaping with a whole skin from this shower of missiles directed toward the heavens.

"What would happen if one of those bombs sent some of its contents into the gas bag, Tom?" Lucille asked, breathlessly, as though anticipating seeing the Zeppelin collapse at any moment.

"Well, that depends on how many of the compartments happened to be damaged," was the reply. "You see, they make them up of a lot of units, perhaps as many as ten or twenty. They're arranged on the same order as ocean steamships are these days. If one compartment of a boat is flooded it doesn't matter much, if only the doors between have been shut beforehand."

"Oh! how smart of them!" ventured Lucille.

"But the steering apparatus of these dirigibles is the weakest link in the chain, I reckon," the boy continued. "If the Allies could only put that out of business you'd see something happen mighty quick, believe me."

"I'm glad they're not going to pass over our heads," Lucille observed.

"Well, I am too," her brother admitted; "but not because of anything the Zeppelin might do. Think of all the stuff that's being wasted up there rattling down again, will you? Excuse me from being underneath the shower."

"Is the balloon still coming down, do you think, Tom?"

"Seems that way to me."

"What reckless men those Germans are!" Lucille marveled.

"They have their share of it, though you'll find just as many French, British, yes, and Belgian air pilots who'd be willing to take any sort of risk so as to try and make a big scoop."

"But suppose they do blow up the ammunition train, Tom, what good would it do those men up there?"

"Huh! a heap of glory, if they live through it," Tom replied. "I wouldn't be much surprised if the Kaiser, with his own hands, fastened the Iron Cross on each man's breast. You don't know what sol-

diers will dare for such a wonderful reward as that."

Perhaps Lucille, being only a girl, could not grasp the idea. It certainly did not seem to appeal to her in the same way it did to Tom.

The dirigible had passed the first line of trenches amidst a storm of shots. Tom tried to picture in his mind what the feelings of those daring men up there must be.

"Excuse me, but I don't think I'd like to be along with them," he shouted in the ear of Lucille; for the guns were making such a dreadful clatter that ordinary speech could not be heard.

All at once Tom gave a yell.

"Oh! what is it?" demanded Lucille, eagerly.

"They got the Germans, as sure as anything!"

"What makes you think so?"

"Why," cried the exultant boy, "look at the tail-end of the long gas-bag; don't you see how it begins to drag lower than the front? They're turning around."

"Does that mean they've given up the attack?"

"It must. With the Zeppelin unmanageable they couldn't expect to steer directly over the train, you see. And now the only hope they have is to get out of range of those bombs before they are smashed completely."

M. Armand, the man of mystery, and every one of the French soldiers betrayed great excitement as

they awaited the final result of the battle of earth and sky.

The bombs were bursting all around the airship now. It seemed almost a miracle that those aboard could escape annihilation; yet some power appeared to guard them.

"Honest, I almost hope they do get away," said Tom; "when men are as brave as that I take off my cap to them, even if they are Germans, and our family came from France. They took a big chance, and are good losers, all right!"

As the Zeppelin moved further and further away, heading across the valley in the direction of the German lines, the firing became more furious than ever.

While the airship continued to drop lower and lower, as though her ability to remain afloat had been seriously affected, at the same time this was offset by the fact of her sailing away from the Allies' trenches.

"She's beyond the range of some of the guns already!" Tom presently announced, with a long-drawn sigh, as though he hardly knew whether to rejoice or feel sorry.

"And it's pretty hard to see the balloon any longer," added Lucille; "because it's made of light-colored stuff that seems to blend with the floating clouds."

"Oh! that's done on purpose," Tom assured her.

"They want to hide their dirigibles as much as they can, you understand. There, I guess she's safe, all right. Most of the guns have stopped firing."

"But what are they shouting so about, Tom?" Lucille demanded, as loud cheers began to ascend from all along the Allies' line of works.

"Oh! like as not they know what the dirigible was aiming at when it started out," Tom explained, "and they're whooping it up because the plan was knocked on the head. The French were too keen for the Germans that time, I tell you. They had things all fixed for a Zeppelin raid."

"And now that it's all over we can go on again, I suppose?" Lucille ventured.

"We must leave all that to M. Armand," replied Tom; "he's running the business, and I'm satisfied to have it so. Fact is, he's the most wonderful man I ever had anything to do with; and I'd give a cooky to know just what his business is. When a man hobnobs with people like the commander-in-chief of the French forces, and is received with a hearty handshake by even the British general, he must be of some account, that's sure."

Of course Tom said this in a low tone, and was careful that only Lucille caught his words. He would not have liked M. Armand to hear him confess that curiosity was fairly eating him up; it would have been a poor return for all the other had done for the Maillards.

Apparently the pilot of the expedition was now satisfied to proceed again, since he spoke to the sergeant, who was holding in the eager dog all this while.

They had hardly started when again there arose a turmoil that thrilled Tom and his sister.

"Is the Zeppelin coming back again?" cried Lucille.

"Impossible!" answered Tom.

"But listen to all the firing!" she continued.

"Those are heavy German 'hochs' we hear!" exclaimed the boy, startled by the realization of the fact. "It must be another attack on the French lines!"

"Oh! what a terrible place for us to be in!" she called out, in alarm.

"They figured on the Zeppelin managing to blow up the ammunition train," said Tom, "and hoped to jump in on the Allies before they could recover from the shock, chasing them out of their trenches. But they'll find they've bitten off more than they can chew this time."

M. Armand came hurrying back.

"Hasten, children," he said, in that compelling voice of his, "we must find some sort of shelter before the Maxims begin to rake this ground. We may get caught between two columns, and be in the range of fire."

Of course this knowledge caused Tom and Lucille

to hurry their steps. Already the clamor was redoubling, as the oncoming files of Germans began to meet resistance.

Had it been pitch-dark no doubt searchlights, which had been prepared for such an occasion, might have started to play upon the assaulting host, while batteries of big guns and quick-firers opened up with a deadly hailstorm of missiles. Since the moonlight was strong enough to show the positions of the charging enemy there was no necessity for this artificial illumination.

The sergeant and his men clustered around the fugitives. It was as though those gallant Frenchmen would shield as much as possible with their own bodies those who had been committed to their care. Tom never forgot this act, because he knew it was voluntary on their part, and not the result of some order from M. Armand.

"Here, this way!" called out the last-named, as he caught sight of what seemed to be a spur of the Allies' trenches close by; "we can drop behind the piles of earth and be safe from harm, for a time at least!"

He called out something in a loud voice. It must have been to warn those who were hidden in the trenches that they were friends of France, for answering words came to reassure them. Men even scrambled up and helped lower them into the depths of the excavation.

M. Armand immediately assured his charges that they need fear nothing.

“Depend on it these brave men will keep the enemy back, children,” he concluded, as he laid a hand on each of their heads in a fatherly way.

Sitting there, and with every nerve on edge, Tom and Lucille listened to the sounds of the battle, now growing louder and more bitter. The detonation of many firearms both large and small, the cheering of furious men, the explosion of shells, and even the singing of those solid masses of Germans who rushed forward with their shoulders touching — all these things united to make a frightful chorus.

Talking was impossible, so Tom and his sister could only cower down, and wait to learn how it was all going to come out. The sergeant had tossed the dog into the cavity when he jumped, and was doubtless still holding the animal.

Closer still the swelling roar seemed to come to where they had found shelter. Tom could see the shadowy figures of the trench guardians standing there, and many times sharp explosions announced that they were doing their duty.

Somewhere nearby there must have been a battery of Maxims in full play. The peculiar “chatter” they made as they ground out their “feed” was something that once heard could never be forgotten.

Indeed, those who had sought shelter in the trenches had reason for more or less uneasiness. If

the mad charge of the Germans carried them that far who could say what might follow? True, M. Armand seemed to have the utmost confidence in the ability of the French soldiers, whom he called "my children," to repulse the enemy; but then, while Tom and Lucille believed this man of mystery to be a marvel, still he could not work miracles. And those hoarse "hochs" were terribly near!

Tom, like the good brother he was, threw a protecting arm around Lucille. While no words were said, this seemed to do her a world of good, for she snuggled closer to him, as though believing that her brother would be able to shield her from harm.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE SECRET OF MONSIEUR ARMAND

“COURAGE! they are holding them in check!”

Tom had to shout these words close to the ear of Lucille, in order to make sure that she could hear what he was saying, so loud was the clamor of battle.

It seemed to come and go like the billows of the ocean on the beach. With thousands of excited men adding their hoarse voices to the roar of guns the combination was startling.

Tom really believed he had good cause for feeling hopeful. He noted that those in the trenches were acting as though wild to leap out, and launch a bayonet charge. In fact it was only because the order from their commanding officer had not yet been given that they held back.

M. Armand was standing up, evidently peering over the edge of the excavation. He seemed as calm as though there was not the least particle of danger and this fact did much to reassure Lucille. At the same time it increased the admiration Tom entertained for the man whose friendship had proven so valuable.

Then all of a sudden it seemed as though their

ears would split with the shrill shrieks that broke out all around them.

Lucille, seeing that the French were scrambling out of the pits, trembled with new fears, so that Tom found it necessary to put his lips close to her ear and shout:

“They are not deserting us — don’t be afraid — they have been ordered to charge on the enemy, that’s all! And there they go like mad, too!”

Indeed, the trenches were already emptied of all but a few wounded men. Tom, unable to restrain his eagerness any longer, climbed up on the platform that had been arranged for firing parties. He was thus able to just look over the top of the excavation, which at this point had not been completed with a covering, as most of the trenches were.

Tom could only see a confusion of figures struggling in the moonlight. It was impossible to tell friend from foe, though he could hear all sorts of battle cries being shouted by the striving rivals.

The boy saw that the assailants were in retreat, though stubbornly contesting every foot of ground. Their plans had gone amiss, owing in the first place to the misfortune that had come to the airship, so that the ammunition train had not been destroyed.

Tom could also see that the ground was dotted with forms of valiant soldiers, belonging to both sides, who had gone down in the battle. He told

himself that never before to an American lad had been given such a golden chance to look upon an actual engagement between two great armies, backed with the most modern of weapons.

It satisfied him to know that the danger, so far as they were concerned, could now be reckoned as past. Unless heavy reënforcements came up to sustain the retreating Germans they would be compelled to retire to the shelter of their own lines.

M. Armand had seemed fascinated by the sight. As a loyal Frenchman he must have felt proud of the brilliant charge which those wearers of the baggy red trousers had just executed.

At the same time he had not forgotten his charges. Turning his eyes from the misty scene beyond he faced Tom and Lucille.

"Now is our chance, children, to get away from here," he called out, for the roar of battle was still in the air, even though the struggling hosts had veered to one side, and were moving off further.

The sergeant must have understood what was intended, for he started some of his men, who had stayed close by, to climbing out of the hole. Then Tom was given a helping hand, and Lucille also. Tom noted that the sergeant appeared to be unusually respectful when it came to extending a hand to M. Armand, who had first insisted on handing up Lucille.

Even the dog was lifted up to the level by the

sergeant's last man and all seemed ready for making new progress.

But before they turned their backs upon the battle-field they stood with uncovered heads for a minute. It was possibly an act of homage on the part of M. Armand and the soldiers; they were paying respect to the brave comrades who had fallen in defense of the tri-color of France.

Tom and Lucille stood with clasped hands. The Maxim fire had died out and even the fierce sounds of conflict were coming from a greater and greater distance.

There lay the moon-flooded field. Already were men with stretchers beginning to stumble hither and thither, searching for the wounded. No matter on which side they had fought, it was all the same, and first come first served was the order of the Red Cross.

Pitiful cries were wafted to the ears of those who listened. They would not soon be forgotten by the two Americans who had been thrown between the lines of the battling forces on French soil.

"Come, let us go!" they heard M. Armand say,

The dog was no longer to be depended on. All this commotion was enough to have destroyed any desire on the part of Mina to follow a scent. Besides, they had abandoned the trail at the time the rush for shelter was made.

"It does not matter," said M. Armand, when Tom

mentioned this to him. "We know very well which field hospital the dog was heading for at the time we sighted the Zeppelin. So instead of wasting time we shall now walk directly that way."

The last glimpse they had of the field where the terrible fight had taken place showed them lighted lanterns. Men went this way and that, examining all the fallen, and possibly looking for commanding officers among the Germans, who had been overtaken by death while exhorting their men to advance.

"There comes the train that the dirigible was after," Tom told Lucille, when they had mounted a low elevation, that allowed a survey to the south.

The line of slowly moving lights, and the sparks issuing from the smokestack of the engine drawing the heavily laden vans betrayed the presence of the train.

"Do you think we can be near the field hospital?" asked Lucille, trying to forget the terrible things she had just witnessed, and once more pick up the thread of their own fortunes.

"I've got an idea it must be over yonder," answered Tom, pointing.

"Where those lights are, you mean?"

"Yes, because we're heading straight that way; and you heard what he said about taking a bee-line there," the boy replied.

Lucille did not pursue the subject any further, but

her brother knew very well what her thoughts must be. Would they find dear old Uncle Alvin at the field hospital in the care of young Doctor Jacques? At least they were likely to know the worst inside of ten minutes or so, for the twinkling lights ahead were not very far distant.

No doubt those in charge were hastening to get everything in readiness for the new lot of cases that soon would be carried in, when the men with the stretchers, and the field ambulances, began to arrive.

Lucille caught Tom's arm in a convulsive clutch when they found themselves close to the tents, and the moving figures, many of them nurses wearing the Red Cross on their arms.

M. Armand, knowing how terribly their young hearts must be gripped with the suspense of the moment, did a thing which showed how he cared for them. He came and put his steady arm around the shrinking figure of poor, tired Lucille, and his brave words of cheer did much to rekindle the flame of hope in her heart.

"It will be all right, children, believe me," he told them; "prepare then to greet this charming old uncle of yours in the proper spirit. Here we are close to the large tent which is used as the headquarters of the field hospital. It is in this section, then, we should find him, if he is the guest and charge of Doctor Jacques."

All at once Lucille uttered a cry.

"There he is now — Doctor Jacques, I mean! And he looks this way, too! Doctor, oh! Doctor, wait for us, please!" she called out in her best French.

The young surgeon, of whom they had become quite fond in the long days when Uncle Alvin was confined to the town hospital, must have heard his name called aloud, for he started toward the group. He could hardly believe his eyes on seeing Lucille and her brother.

"This is indeed a great pleasure, I assure you," he told them, hastening up with outstretched hand; "and now I can tell what you are going to ask me before you say a word. Yes, he is as well as could be expected, and in a minute you can see him."

Tom felt the little figure at his side quiver. Then Lucille tried to laugh, although the effort was hysterical, and pretty much of a failure, because her nerves had been too much racked of late for merriment.

Hurriedly they turned into the large tent, and there sure enough they found Uncle Alvin. The little old gentleman was sitting upon some sort of rude cot, and had an army blanket thrown over his shoulders. He had no doubt been listening to those sounds of warfare that must have come from the other side of the rise.

Perhaps he caught the glad cry that Lucille could

not keep back as she started toward him. At any rate Uncle Alvin suddenly stretched out his two hands, and in another minute the girl was crying in the shelter of his arms.

Tom, too, came in for a share of attention, for Uncle Alvin was exceedingly fond of the boy. Of course he recognized M. Armand, who shook hands with him as though they were old friends.

"You must be our good angel, Monsieur," Uncle Alvin told him. "First you snatch a silly old man out from under the wheels of a motor 'bus in the streets of London, and now you have also saved my beloved children. How shall we ever thank you?"

"By always praying for the success of my poor country in her fight for national existence," answered the other, gravely.

"That I shall certainly do every day I live," replied the old gentleman with enthusiasm; "and not only because we are indebted so much to you, Monsieur, but because we too have French blood in our veins."

"You delight me," the other told him, with beaming eyes; "and before I leave you, for urgent business demands that I go elsewhere shortly, I will see that you are given a chance to start southward, either to Paris, or to Havre as you choose. If you intend to cross over to England again, then you would do well to make for the coast without delay."

They soon realized that this mysterious man

seemed to command considerable authority on the fighting line. When the general in charge of that section came to the field hospital half an hour later he greeted M. Armand with great respect and cordiality, a fact Tom noted with curious eyes, and a line across his forehead, as though the mystery hovering over this good friend still worried him.

Finally M. Armand came toward them again. His face was wreathed in smiles.

"I have good news for you all," he said, upon joining them.

"That must mean you have discovered a way in which we can get out of the war zone, and find the land of peace again," suggested Uncle Alvin.

"Yes, in the morning a train will leave the front," they were told. "They will come for you here, under positive orders that you are to be guests of honor. I am sorry that it has to be a sorrowful trip, for many poor fellows who are wounded will be aboard. Perhaps you will be glad to do for them what you are able; for I have seen that our little girl wears a Red Cross on her sleeve, fastened there I am sure with no thought of anything save service."

"Oh! I have already tried to be useful!" cried Lucille, blushing. "Doctor Jacques told me I had the making of a real nurse in me. And we promise you, Monsieur, that anything we can do we will with our whole hearts."

"Your friends, Sir Archibald and his good wife,

are working in there now among the first wounded to arrive. They have decided to stay here, he to get news for his newspaper, and she to be a nurse. I believe she will be one of the best we have, she seems so sensible, so strong. They expect to meet you again before you go. And now I must say good-by. If I do not see you again I shall often think of you."

He squeezed Lucille's hand, shook that of Uncle Alvin, and turning to Tom, said:

"Walk with me outside, my son, where I will say adieu, and give you a last word."

Tom hastened to accompany him. He wondered whether the man of mystery might not be intending in parting from him to say a few words that would tell something of his identity.

As Monsieur Armand held out his hand there was a little smile on his dark face.

"I have your home address, Thomas," he said, "and it may be, some time in the dim future, after this war is over, and France has come into her own, I might take a run across to your great country, which I have not visited for some years, since I was quartered in Washington on the staff of our ambassador. Of course you are wondering what office I hold, that I seem to know so many great men. I am going to whisper it to you; but promise that you will not reveal my secret even to your sister, until you are on the steamer, homeward bound."

"I give you my word of honor, sir," said Tom, earnestly.

"This is all," continued Monsieur Armand, softly; "I am the representative of the President of the French Republic. I carry his orders back and forth. I am trusted by him, and that is why even General Joffre is my friend. Remember, silence! And, Tom, may you all reach your native shores in safety. Adieu, and Heaven bless you!"

And so the mystery that had long puzzled Tom was solved at last. Their friend M. Armand was a man of authority, in close touch with President Poincaré of France. Possibly he had been over in England on secret business at the time they first met him.

"And," said Tom to himself, after the other had left him, "I guess the two soldiers he told us he was looking for, so as to get their signatures to a document, are not to be found in the rank and file of the army. Their names may even be Joffre and Pau, and they wear the insignia of generals in the service of the French Republic."

Then Tom, feeling satisfied with the way things had turned out, once more joined Lucille and Uncle Alvin.

CHAPTER XXX

LEAVING FRANCE BEHIND — CONCLUSION

THROUGH the kindness of Doctor Jacques, Lucille was comfortably settled close to Uncle Alvin for the remainder of the night, with a blanket to wrap around her.

She did not want to stay idle, but the doctor saw that already she must be tired out, and very nervous. When he learned all that Tom and Lucille had endured from the hour they wandered away from the hospital, only intending to take a little walk, he was not much surprised that she should be so overcome.

“There are plenty who can play nurse, and who are in a better physical condition to do it just now than you seem to be, Lucille,” he told her. “As a doctor I advise that you be kept quiet here, so that you may be in condition to leave in the morning. Uncle Alvin, see to it that she remains with you.”

“What did M. Armand have to say to you, Tom?” asked Lucille the first thing, when they were able to talk together, Uncle Alvin having settled back for another nap.

“Well, I like that, now!” exclaimed Tom; “what makes you think he said anything, except to bid me good-by, and wish us all good luck?”

"I could see it in your face when you came back," she told him, "and so own up."

"I'm sorry," returned Tom, "but for once your wheedling isn't going to count for a cent. The fact of the matter is my lips are sealed until we start across the ocean homeward bound. Then I can tell you a little secret; M. Armand gave me permission. And so, until then please don't try to worm it out of me, because you can't — and besides, it wouldn't be fair."

Of course Lucille, knowing Tom as well as she did, would not try to convince him that he should share his secret with her.

"I'll try my best to wait, then," she said, with a sigh; "but it's going to be an awful hard thing to do. But just now, Tom, I feel that we ought to be thankful that everything has come out as well as it did. Think of what dangers we've escaped; and if everything goes well in the morning we'll be on our way to the coast, where we can get a boat for England."

Shortly afterward, finding that poor Lucille had actually fallen asleep, Tom believed he might leave her for a while. He wanted to see what a field hospital was like, and if his friend Doctor Jacques could make any use of him.

The very first person he ran across after leaving the large tent was Sir Archibald Featherstone. The little baronet was hurrying along, as though he

carried the fate of empires on his shoulders; but at sight of Tom he came to a sudden stop and was soon pumping the boy's hand.

"Meant to look you up, after they told me you and your sister had come in," he hurriedly exclaimed, as he kept working Tom's hand. "You see, my wife has made up her mind she can be of considerable use here in the hospital, so now she's wearing the Red Cross. As for me, I've picked up a tremendous amount of information which I would like to get on to my paper, if only I had some way to send it there, you know."

"Why not trust it to me, then?" suggested Tom.

"My word! do you mean that you expect to go across soon?" cried the delighted baronet, starting to shake Tom's hand again.

"M. Armand has arranged it so that the three of us will leave the front on the train that carries the wounded," Tom told him. "It starts in the morning, and we have hopes of landing in England inside of a few days, if we're lucky. Give me a packet, and I'll see that it gets to your editor, as soon as we reach London."

"That's jolly good of you, don't you know!" cried the delighted baronet. "Here, it is made up to include the recent attempt of the enemy to explode our ammunition train, and the fight that followed. A beastly bad job all around, and I hope my account will hearten Old England up."

He promised to look them up early in the morning, when the train started; and sure enough both the baronet and his wife were there to bid farewell to those who had been their fellow refugees.

Doctor Jacques was also on hand to say good-by. He had been working throughout the night, and even superintended removing those of the wounded who were supposed to be in a condition to bear the long railway journey south, to where the country, not being overrun with the enemy, could take better care of them.

"I'm sure glad to be getting away from where all the fighting is going on," Tom told Lucille, after they had been an hour aboard the hospital train, of which the wounded occupied nearly all the carriages and vans, attended by a certain number of Red Cross nurses, with a couple of doctors as well.

"I've heard you say more than once, Tom," Lucille told him, "that you'd like to see what a battle looked like. I hope you're satisfied now."

"Yes, I never want to watch another as long as I live," he admitted. "I know how you feel about it, too. I was just wondering if we might run across the Dorrs over in London. We expected to meet in Rome, you know, but they say people have had to get out of there about as fast as they did from Switzerland, so the chances are, every American will make for England to get a vessel home."

"Yes, and now you're thinking about that silly

wager you made with Harvey; own up that I'm right, Tom?" Lucille rallied him, for at times it seemed as though she could almost read her brother's thoughts.

"Well, I was wondering where Harv and his little snapshot camera are about now," Tom admitted. "Then there are our good friends the Caslons, who expected to have such a glorious time of it in Austria; I wonder if they've seen anything of the fighting over there."

"Austria is deep in the war, isn't she?" demanded Lucille.

"Yes, but there has been no real invasion of her territory, as happened in Belgium and Northern France; so I imagine the Dorrs and ourselves will be the only ones of all the party to have exciting stories to tell."

When Tom said that he was mistaken. Those of their friends who had gone to the country of the Tyrol happened to be caught in just as serious predicaments as had come to the Maillards in France, and the Dorrs in Belgium. Just what adventures befell the Caslons, and what stirring war scenes they found themselves mixed up in, will be found narrated in the next volume of this series, under the title of "Between the Lines in Austria."

The hospital train pursued its way steadily southwestward, and in due time Uncle Alvin, with Tom and his sister reached Havre. There they had to

wait a short time before they could obtain accommodations across to England, such was the rush of American tourists headed homeward.

"Our glorious vacation tour didn't pan out just as we figured, eh, children?" remarked the little old gentleman, after they found themselves safely aboard, and leaving the harbor, headed westward for the hospitable shores of England.

"Oh! well, Uncle, we're so happy to think of getting away safe and sound," Lucille told him, "that you're not going to hear a single word of complaint from us, is he, Tom?"

"He certainly will not," replied the one addressed, with a shake of the head; "and when you come to think of it, haven't we a thousand times more interesting happenings to tell when we get back home than if we'd just finished up that automobile trip in the regular way?"

"Yes," mused Uncle Alvin, "you have seen strange sights for those so young. I can only hope that it will make you more serious and thoughtful on account of having encountered so much human suffering. When we get to London to-night we will find a place to stay, and then look around, so as to learn if any of our friends have arrived."

"My first duty will be to hustle around to that newspaper office, and hand in the packet of copy Sir Archibald trusted to me. Every day I'll watch that sheet to find out what kind of a writer our friend is.

It'll give us a queer feeling, to be reading a description of the very things we saw happen with our own eyes."

"How long shall we stay in London, Uncle?" asked Lucille, with a sigh, and a quick glance toward her brother.

"A very few days only, if we can get a boat to New York," the little old gentleman assured her. "Just long enough to get rested, fed, and see if our friends have arrived. Then it's for us to get started for home."

"And when our boat leaves the dock, Tom," continued Lucille, wistfully, "you'll remember to keep your promise to me, won't you, and tell me the secret you're holding back?"

Tom smiled at her, knowing what any girl must be enduring to be kept in ignorance so long.

"I gave you my word, and you know I never break it," he told her; and with that assurance she had to be content. So they sat there, and with varied emotions watched the shore of France fade further and further in the distance.

NOTES

NOTE I. SEE PAGE 40.

What Monsieur Armand so cautiously told Mr. Maillard and the young people that day in Paris, when they discovered him talking to the celebrated French commander, General Joffre, was in fact just what did happen shortly afterward. Servia had received an ultimatum from Austria, and had agreed to all the terms but one, which she believed was more than any free and independent nation could submit to; but at the same time expressed a willingness to have disinterested parties at The Hague arbitrate between her big neighbor and herself.

Austria would not have this, but threatened invasion unless an immediate and favorable reply were given. Then Russia, who looked upon Servia in the light of a godchild, stepped in and protested that she would have something to say about that. Mobilization began. Germany, as Austria's ally, demanded that Russia cease to mobilize. Failing this Germany suddenly declared war on Russia, which of course meant France also, since the fortunes of those two countries were united.

Great Britain, finding that Germany's plan of campaign necessitated a crossing of Belgium, whose neutrality had been agreed upon by all the Great Powers, warned the Teutonic empire that unless her troops were withdrawn inside of twenty-four hours she would consider the act hostile, and be compelled to make war upon Germany. Belgium resisted to the utmost the invasion of her country, and really ruined the plans of the Germans for a dash

upon Paris, by holding their armies up many days through a heroic, if hopeless, defense.

What Monsieur Armand knew at that time previous to the actual outbreak of hostilities was of course just as familiar to all those who had their finger on the feverish pulse of events that were so rapidly transpiring throughout the great nations of Europe.

NOTE 2. SEE PAGE 93.

While the French mobilization could never for a single moment be compared with the marvelous work accomplished throughout the length and breadth of Germany, at the same time from the hour that the order was flashed along the telegraph lines the entire country was in a ferment. Trains were immediately commandeered for the use of the military, and unlucky travelers had to do the best possible; for their journeys were instantly interrupted. Everything had to give way to the one great necessity of the hour, the gathering of the uniformed hosts, with their supplies, baggage, horses it might be, guns, ammunition and everything needed for the campaign.

Such tourists as were caught in France, Germany, Austria, and even Belgium found themselves in a trap from which escape was tedious, and in some cases hopeless. If they possessed the means to hire a car it was only to have it taken away the first time they encountered a detachment of soldiers, because the Nation needed every automobile it could beg, borrow, or take by violent means, giving security, of course, that after the war was over the owner would receive pay.

Riding on trains was almost prohibited for civilians, since they took the place of the country's defenders. So many thousands of Americans had to do more actual tramping, under adverse conditions, than they could re-

member in years of their past. Hundreds and thousands of returned tourists have had thrilling stories to tell of the strange adventures that fell to their lot while endeavoring to make their way to London, where they could hope to get a steamer for America. And never in all their lives were these same pilgrims one-half so delighted to set eyes on the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor as during that late summer and early fall.

NOTE 3. SEE PAGE 112.

It may be that the true reason may never be known why the army of General von Kluck, after so gallantly pressing on through Northern France, despite all the resistance offered by the French and British, suddenly declined to undertake the siege of Paris, and turned aside in a tremendous sweep. That may remain one of the military secrets of Germany for all time. It can safely be assumed, however, that it must have been a very powerful reason, for the hearts of the invaders were set upon capturing the French capital and the Kaiser had doubtless been picturing himself riding along the principal avenues at the head of his victorious army.

The most probable reason advanced has been that as the French and British armies were still in the field, and dangers multiplied to the slender line of communication which the Germans held with their base in Belgium, General von Kluck did not dare settle down to a siege. He could not hope to batter down those numerous modern forts defending Paris until the great siege mortars were brought up, which would take considerable time, as they had to be hauled much of the way by special road engines.

This possibility had been foreseen, and every possible preparation made for a successful retreat. The Battle

of the Marne was, in one sense, a rear-guard action, since the Germans were already moving back toward their lines on the Aisne, where men had been busily engaged making trenches and mounting heavy guns. How sturdily they maintained their grip on that section of Northern France every one knows who all through the fall and early winter read day after day the story of the fight of the rival trenches; where the hostile armies were often close enough to each other to exchange trifles when a temporary truce was called.

NOTE 4. SEE PAGE 120.

Doubtless many of the stories that have been told concerning the amazing preparations made by the alert German military people for the event of just such a world war have been overstated. All manner of incredible yarns flew around until it was next to impossible to sift the chaff from the wheat. Enough is known, however, to satisfy the most incredulous person that they left few things undone that would accrue to their benefit in case of hostilities.

Among these hills of Northern France numerous places were found where solid concrete foundations had been made for some projected works; and then the idea seemed to have been abandoned. In every instance it was a German capitalized company that owned the ground; and these solid foundations just suited the great guns that later on came to be used on those elevations. Strange to say, in every case the abandoned factory foundation was upon a point of wonderful strategical importance in the famous retreat of the German host to the region of the Aisne. So it appears that accident had no part in such an amazing combination.

Near Antwerp, too, where certain German merchants

owned country seats situated possibly five or seven miles away, it was discovered that in one case there had been made a remarkable tennis court of solid concrete. No one ever dreamed that it was of such thickness until later on one of those terrible howitzers was planted on this foundation, and had the exact range of the forts defending the city.

They even declared that over in England certain foundations were discovered; but such reports can be taken with a grain of salt. During the "spy scare" any sort of a story found ready sale among the London newspapers, as such reports were supposed to assist recruiting.

NOTE 5. SEE PAGE 131.

History already tells us that within a few hours after the order for a general mobilization had been given the whole German Empire underwent an extraordinary change. At every railway station there suddenly sprang up, not camps of tents, but long lines of pitch-pine sheds, every board ready-cut so that it could be dropped into place. When the first detachment of reservists appeared, according to the time-table in the hands of every sergeant, at its appointed station, the men found shelter from sun and rain, and long tables whereon the Red Cross organization had prepared water, lemonade, and even sausages.

So exact were the arrangements in all these respects, at any rate throughout Prussia, that on receipt of the order for mobilization even ice was ready to cool the drinking water. From every village throughout the vast Empire little knots of men began to trudge to the stations, whence they would be transported to their regimental headquarters.

A writer in describing the astounding changes that had

taken place five days after the order had gone forth, speaks of the huge level plain which reaches from the Silesian forests to the Teutoburg hills. He says: "The open country appeared as if it had been swept of all its inhabitants. In the golden cornfields were wagons, half-laden; here and there stood a ladder against a half finished rick; even the women had disappeared, and the only sign of human life over mile after mile of the great plain was an occasional silent figure, usually an old man, standing, shotgun in hand, by a bridge or level crossing."

In the summer resorts, in the height of the season, guests, waiters, and the inn-keepers themselves were gone. Every man liable to military duty knew his place, and like spokes of an immense wheel they flew to take their part in the wonderful organization. Truly the like has never been seen before, and may never come again.

NOTE 6. SEE PAGE 162.

Ever since the Franco-Prussian war in the early seventies the word "Uhlán" has been used in certain parts of France as a means of frightening rebellious children, much as some fathers and mothers threaten their offspring with the coming of an ogre; or colored folks in the South warn their pickaninnies that the "boogerman" will catch them if they don't mend their ways.

The probability of the matter is that these terrible Uhlans are no better, no worse, than any raiding body of daring cavalrymen, who take their lives in their own hands continually when sweeping through the enemy's country. War is a cruel business at best, and Germans have been trained to be soldiers first, and humane citizens afterwards. When Sherman pushed through Georgia the same was said of his raiding cavalry. Forrest did exactly the same things for the Confederates when he

found his command in a desperate situation, with enemies on all sides. Necessity compels many things that look harsh.

Very likely many of those same Uhlans who gained such a hard name, when at home are mothers' boys, and respectable units of the community in which they live. But at the call to the colors they become soldiers, and for the time being the old life is a thing of the past. After the war is over those who survive will perhaps go back to their families, and resume their previous occupations. Nor will their neighbors look upon them as ogres and savages.

The Cossacks are somewhat different, because they come from the wild sections of Russia and Siberia. Many of them might be compared with our reckless western cow-punchers, having lived amidst scenes of excitement, and possessing an utter disregard concerning their own lives. These Russian cavalymen are feared far more by the dwellers of East Prussia farms than any Uhlan could be in France; since they present a wild, barbaric appearance when they swoop down on village or patrol, which is calculated to strike terror to the hearts of those opposed to them.

NOTE 7. SEE PAGE 168.

Never in the history of all wars were such wonderful trenches constructed as on both sides during that sanguinary struggle of weeks and weeks along the Aisne, and over in Belgium as well. Men often stayed in these excavations for a week at a time. They were said to possess "all the comforts of home." However true that may be, they were certainly constructed in a way that allowed of the greatest freedom of movement, being all of six to seven feet deep, with a raised platform upon

which the marksmen stood when firing, and which would also keep them from standing in the water in case of a heavy rain.

Over the top was a veritable roof or canopy, often of sheet-iron or steel, and shrapnel proof, as well as affording a means for throwing aside most of the rain that might chance to fall. The men slept on this raised platform, for there was usually a cavity dug into the ground that allowed for considerable space being occupied when a soldier was stretched out at length, covered with a blanket.

When two armies have entrenched in this way, even using vast quantities of concrete in places to make their hiding-places more substantial, the fighting must naturally partake more of the nature of a siege than an ordinary battle. Those Germans proved to be splendid "stickers," and had to be actually dug out of their holes. In some places the Allies undermined their trenches, and blew them up.

Taken all in all, the surprises of this war have beaten all records in scores of ways. The preparedness of the Germans will forever stand as the high-water mark of forethought; even with those who condemn the world empire idea that seemed to be the main motive back of all their plans.

NOTE 8. SEE PAGE 194.

What Tom referred to was the wonderful siege gun known as a howitzer, which in fact battered the modern fortresses of Liège, Namur and Antwerp to pieces. These the Germans had begun to manufacture after the Russo-Japanese war, as the result of what their military observers had seen the Japanese howitzers accomplish.

Austria, too, had been making them in quantities. The work of these strange guns was watched with great interest. Many generals, even in the German army, disbelieved in them; but expert German opinion had given its unqualified approval.

They were of almost incredible size, some German papers claiming that 17-inch howitzers had been manufactured by the Krupps, and were being used; but it is certain that shells eleven inches in diameter were thrown.

One writer in speaking of the bombardment of the steel-domed forts at Liége goes on to say: "Picture the scene. The forts, probably not too well provided with ammunition or food, automatically raised their steel cupolas, and fired at anything in sight. Men could no longer man the earthworks, for bursting shells covered them. Zeppelins dropped explosives from above; the shells rained incessantly. The acrid smoke from the high explosives penetrated the forts, a smoke that stupefies, numbs, and sometimes renders men half-conscious. An hour under such a storm of missiles must have been a purgatory. The heroes of Liége held on day after day, listening every moment for the sounds of the relieving army which never arrived."

A howitzer differs from an ordinary cannon. Its great shell is sent upwards, and is so arranged that it falls with frightful velocity upon the object that it is intended to demolish. So the Carib Indian would shoot his arrow up in the air and with such wonderful skill that in descending it would pierce the shell of a great sea turtle lying asleep on the surface of the water some distance away. The principle involved in piercing that hard turtle-shell was applied to smashing the tough steel domes of the modern forts, and successfully, too.

NOTE 9. SEE PAGE 201.

When Tom told his sister that military maneuvers in these modern days had to be conducted from a vastly different standpoint than when Napoleon and Grant won their remarkable victories, he must have had in mind a number of things he had read along these lines. In the first place the millions of men engaged make sudden results impossible. With a battle line stretching perhaps a hundred miles, and three or four millions of men, all armed with up-to-date weapons, furiously engaging each other, the results are uncertain. In one place the advantage lies with Germans, and in another with the Allies or the Russians. The Battle of the Marne took days; while in Russia with the second German invasion for days and days terrible engagements were going on at various points before any tangible result could be attained on either side.

Then again such maneuvers as aided Napoleon to win most of his victories, through taking his enemies by surprise, are no longer feasible. Aeroplane scouting has spoiled all the romance and glamour of battles. They must now depend mostly on holding power, the ability to get the most men up to the firing line; and in keeping the line of communication clear so that fresh supplies of food and ammunition may be constantly arriving.

Besides these features that go to make such radical changes in the fighting, it was through the use of countless motor trucks and automobiles that the wonderfully rapid advance of the German armies was accomplished. At times thousands of these would carry the troops forward a certain number of miles, and then rush back for another load. So that the power of gasoline, or as they call it abroad, "petrol," was a potent factor in accom-

plishing many of the amazing feats that have been recorded in the history of the great European conflict.

NOTE 10. SEE PAGE 239.

As a rule the emblem of mercy known as the Red Cross was carefully regarded by all parties in the great European conflict. French, British, German and Belgian armies all had nurses, doctors and attendants working under this sacred emblem; and unless the necessity was very urgent their guns were never allowed to be trained on a section where that flag floated, whether over a regular hospital or one in the field.

There might arise occasions, however, when some absolute necessity compelled the bombardment of a position close to such a hospital, and considering that the hostile guns were located many miles away it was not strange that more or less damage was done to property that should have had protection from all flying shells.

It is almost beyond reason to believe that either side would deliberately shell a building in which the wounded were being succored; perhaps many of their own men as well as those of the other side. The Germans were accused of this much more than the Allies, which possibly arose from the fact that their discipline was more severe; and men counted for so little as against the national results to be attained.

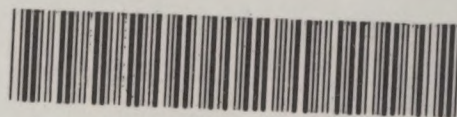
Some of the stories that were current with regard to such abuses of the recognized rules of modern warfare may have been founded on fact; but many others no doubt were manufactured out of whole cloth. The hospital in the town where the Maillards were marooned so long happened to be in a bad position, since it lay in the direct line of fire of the German batteries on the far-off hills. It certainly had not been picked out as a particular ob-

ject at which to fire; but being in bad company had, like Dog Tray, suffered from associations. Those in charge, realizing that their patients would be in constant peril if they remained, had managed to have them all removed on the first night of the bombardment.

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